



RICHARD KALMIN

THE SAGE IN JEWISH SOCIETY
OF LATE ANTIQUITY

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THE SAGE IN JEWISH SOCIETY OF LATE ANTIQUITY

Persian society of late antiquity was rigidly hierarchical and movement between and even within classes was very difficult. Roman society, in contrast, exhibited egalitarian tendencies and social boundaries were generally more fluid. What past generations have viewed as a fundamental distinction between Judaism and Christianity is shown by Richard Kalmin to be culturally conditioned, rather than built into the deep structure of the religion. It is true of rabbinic Judaism in one locality but not the other.

The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity explores the social position of rabbis in Palestinian (Roman) and Babylonian (Persian) society from the period of the fall of the Temple in 70 CE to late antiquity. The author argues that ancient rabbinic sources depict comparable differences between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis. Palestinian sages interacted closely with non-rabbis, in part because of their relatively insecure place in society, whereas Babylonian sages occupied a stronger place in society and could therefore afford to keep their distance from non-rabbis. Richard Kalmin also discusses the historicity of rabbinic portrayals and places rabbinic scriptural comments in a historical context. He argues that these interpretations were motivated not only by a desire to explicate the Biblical text but also by social, cultural, religious, polemical and apologetic concerns.

The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity provides an erudite and stimulating analysis of the role of the sage in late antiquity and sheds new light on rabbinic comments on diverse topics such as biblical heroes and genealogy and lineage.

Richard Kalmin is the Theodore R. Racoosin Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia*.

THE SAGE IN JEWISH SOCIETY OF LATE ANTIQUITY

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For Dr Mortimer and Miriam Ostow
in friendship

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PREFACE

The primary rabbinic sources used throughout this book are the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds (also known as the Yerushalmi and Bavli), and various midrashic compilations.¹ The Mishnah and Tosefta are Tannaitic works, and the Talmuds were edited during the post-Tannaitic period but contain much Tannaitic material. Some midrashic compilations are primarily Tannaitic (although in all likelihood they were edited after the Tannaitic period) and others are post-Tannaitic, although like the Talmuds even the latter contain much Tannaitic material.

The term “Tannaitic” describes, approximately, rabbinic literature deriving from the first two centuries CE and the term “post-Tannaitic” describes the classical rabbinic literature composed after this date, ending in approximately the eighth century CE.² The term “early” used throughout this book corresponds roughly to the Tannaitic period, and the term “later” to the post-Tannaitic period.³

The Mishnah, Tosefta, Yerushalmi, and midrashic compilations were edited in Roman Palestine, while the Bavli was edited in Persian Babylonia. The Tosefta and the two Talmuds are based primarily on the Mishnah and the midrashic compilations are based on the Bible.

The rabbis who are this book’s primary objects of study occupied important positions in the political, social, cultural, and religious life of the Jewish people of late antiquity. The study focuses on Babylonian rabbis, who flourished under Persian rule between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is part of modern-day Iraq. These rabbis, also referred to as Babylonian Amoraim, were active from the editing of the Mishnah in the early third century CE until the final editing of the Bavli in the sixth or seventh centuries CE.⁴ This study also examines rabbis who lived in Palestine under Roman domination from the late first century CE, the approximate date of our earliest reliable rabbinic sources,⁵ until the eighth century CE, the approximate date of the final editing of the latest classical midrashim. This book refers to Palestinian rabbis of the first, second, and early third centuries CE as Tannaim, and to Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis, who flourished subsequently, as Amoraim.

This book follows the convention of referring to Palestinian rabbis as “R.,” an abbreviation for “Rabbi,” and to Babylonian rabbis as “Rav.” For example, Yoʿanan, a Palestinian Amora, is called R.Yoʿanan, but Yehuda, a Babylonian Amora, is called Rav Yehuda. Even though this convention is very likely a post-Talmudic scribal imposition onto the sources, and numerous exceptions are preserved in medieval testimonia, manuscripts, and early printed editions of ancient rabbinic texts, it is nevertheless a convenient way to distinguish between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis. The gain in ease of expression more than compensates for the slight loss of precision.

Portions of this book have appeared as articles in earlier publications and have been substantially revised for inclusion in this book. Part of the Introduction was included in “Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity as a Source for Historical Study,” in *Where We Stand, Issues and Debates in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: E.J. Brill, forthcoming). Part of Chapter One was published as “Relations Between Rabbis and Non-Rabbis in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5 (1998), pp. 1–15; part of Chapter Two was included in “Genealogy and Polemics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996), pp. 77–94; Chapter Three was part of “Portrayals of Kings in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3, No. 4 (1996), pp. 321–9; Chapter Four was part of “Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, No. 2 (1994), pp. 155–69; and Chapter Eight was part of “Attitudes Toward Biblical Heroes in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi in Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1998), pp. 369–85.

Several sections of Part Two of this book were presented at a conference entitled *Text and Context: The Talmud Yerushalmi in its Graeco-Roman Environment* in Berlin, Germany, on October 15, 1996. I wish to thank the organizers of the conference, especially Professor Peter Schäfer, and the participants, especially Professors Shaye J.D. Cohen, David Goodblatt, Martin Goodman, Christine Hayes, and Martin Jaffee for their insightful comments and questions. An abbreviated version of Chapter One was read at the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Israel, August, 1997, and the present version benefited from comments by Professors Yaakov Elman, Isaiah Gafni, and Moshe David Herr. I owe special thanks to Professors Chaim Milikowsky, Seth Schwartz and Jeffrey Rubinstein, and to Ms Carol Bakhos, who read an earlier version of this book and helped me clarify my thoughts on numerous important issues. I alone, of course, bear full responsibility for any errors of fact or judgment.

PREFACE

I wish to thank Ms Shari Friedman and Ms Antonia Robertson for their copy-editing suggestions, and Ms Coco Stevenson and Dr Richard Stoneman of Routledge for making the publication process an extremely pleasant one. Finally, I am pleased to acknowledge the generous support of the Lucius N.Littauer Foundation and the Abbel Publication Fund of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

INTRODUCTION

ANCIENT RABBINIC SOURCES AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The historical evidence provided by Talmudic statements or stories rarely takes the form of straightforward descriptions of institutions, personalities, and events. In exploiting Talmudic traditions as historical evidence, it is necessary to explain their moral, didactic, theological, or polemical significance. What societal “itch” are the authors attempting to scratch, what intra-rabbinic problems are they addressing, what issues motivate them to formulate the tradition in a particular way and to build the story around protagonists deriving from a particular time and place?

We begin this book by examining a partly didactic, partly polemical tale and attempt to show that Talmudic narratives, whose concerns are fundamentally ahistorical, are nonetheless susceptible to historical analysis.¹ We will argue that the story under discussion reveals differences between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with other groups in society. It serves, therefore, as an appropriate introduction to this book, whose central concerns are: (1) the differing relationships between rabbis and non-rabbis in the two major rabbinic settlements of late antiquity, and (2) the proper use of ancient rabbinic literature as historical evidence.

The story is as follows:

One day R. Yohanan was bathing in the Jordan. Resh Lakish saw him and thought he was a woman. He stuck his lance into the Jordan and jumped after him into the Jordan.²

[R. Yohanan] said to him. “Your strength for Torah.”

[Resh Lakish] said to him, “Your beauty for women.”

[R. Yohanan] said to him, “If you change your ways, I will give you my sister who is more beautiful than I am.” [Resh Lakish] agreed. He wanted to bring back his lance, but could not.

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[R.Yohanan] taught him Bible and Mishnah and made him a great man. One day they were disputing in the study house: A sword, a knife, a dagger, a lance, a hand saw, and a scythe, when do they become impure? When they are complete. And when are they complete?

R.Yohanan said, "After he smelted them in the furnace."

Resh Lakish said, "After he polished them in water."

[R.Yohanan] said to him, "The brigand knows his trade."

[Resh Lakish] said to him, "What good have you done me? There they called me Rabbi and here they call me Rabbi."³

R.Yohanan became upset. Resh Lakish became ill. [R.Yohanan's] sister came crying.

She said to [R.Yohanan], "Do it for my children."

He said to her, "Leave Me your orphans, I will rear them" (Jeremiah 49:11).

"Do it for my widowhood."

He said to her, "Let your widows rely on Me" (Jeremiah 49:11).

R.Shimon ben Lakish died, and R.Yohanan pined after him.

The rabbis said, "Who will go and settle his mind? Let R.Elazar ben Pedat go, for his traditions are sharp."

He went and sat before [R.Yohanan]. Concerning everything that R. Yohanan said, [R.Elazar] said to him, 'There is a Tannaitic tradition supporting you.'⁴

[R.Yohanan] said, "You are like Bar Lakisha? Bar Lakisha, when I would say something, he would raise twenty-four objections against me and I would respond to him with twenty-four resolutions, and the tradition would be clarified. And you say, There is a Tannaitic tradition which supports you.' Don't I know that I speak well?"

[R.Yohanan] tore his clothes as he walked, crying, "Where are you Bar Lakisha, where are you Bar Lakisha?"

And he shouted until he lost his mind. The rabbis prayed for him and he died.

What is this story's message?⁵ What societal issues or problems motivate it? Absolute certainty on this question is impossible due to the cultural divide separating us from ancient rabbinic authors. Very likely, however, the story is in part a Babylonian critique of the actions of Palestinian rabbis. It disapproves either of specific individuals (R.Yohanan, Resh Lakish, and R.Elazar ben Pedat), or of Palestinian Amoraim in general, choosing as protagonists a few prominent sages who stand for the collective.

In the ensuing discussion I maintain the viability of both possibilities, namely that the story is either a polemic against specific Palestinian rabbis or against Palestinian rabbis in general. I refer throughout, however, to the

story as a polemic against specific Palestinian rabbis since to consistently state both possibilities would require a great deal of clumsy repetition.

The story very likely criticizes (1) Yohanan for using unworthy methods to convince Resh Lakish to pursue a life of Torah study, and (2) Resh Lakish for pursuing a scholarly career for ulterior motives rather than for its own sake. Yohanan entices Resh Lakish to study by promising him his beautiful sister in marriage, and Resh Lakish declares that his career change has profited him nothing: "There they called me Rabbi and here they call me Rabbi."

The story apparently criticizes Palestinian rabbinic attempts to win disciples from among the non-rabbinic population, and protests against the inferior product produced by this outreach effort. The speed with which Resh Lakish despairs of the importance of Torah study demonstrates the shallowness of his "conversion."⁶

Resh Lakish begins his career as Yohanan's clear inferior, claims the story. As Yohanan fondly remembers their relationship, he has the first and last word whenever they speak together, and Resh Lakish's role is confined to that of posing objections against his teacher's opinions. Trouble begins and their relationship breaks down when Resh Lakish claims a measure of equality with his teacher and expresses a contradictory opinion in Yohanan's presence.⁷ The story, in other words, criticizes Resh Lakish's attempt to achieve near-equality with his teacher, which leads to the tragic conclusion.

Very likely, the narrative also disapproves of Yohanan's reaction to Resh Lakish's attempt to achieve near-equality. "The brigand knows his trade," he says angrily, violating the rabbinic prohibition against publicly humiliating one's fellow by reminding him of his sordid past.⁸

In response to Yohanan's insult, Resh Lakish declares that his present life is no better than his former life, as if the only benefit of Torah study is the esteemed title it confers. Yohanan gets upset (literally, his mind weakens), and Resh Lakish falls sick. Apparently Yohanan himself causes Resh Lakish's illness and determines its severity.

Yohanan's sister, Resh Lakish's wife, tries to convince her brother to intercede on her husband's behalf. Yohanan, in what the story views as false piety, cloaks himself behind biblical verses and leaves Resh Lakish's fate up to God. The rabbis' ability to heal, or to pray for the heavenly powers to heal, is the subject of several rabbinic narratives,⁹ and it is no piety on Yohanan's part to refrain from action and allow Resh Lakish to die. Yohanan's false piety is particularly contemptible because he uses scripture to mask the real motive behind his decision not to act: the strength of his anger toward Resh Lakish. Yohanan causes pain to a widow and orphans, further decreasing his stature in our eyes since the Torah repeatedly mandates compassion for these poor and defenseless members of society.

The circumstances of Yohanan's death further support our evaluation of his character. Typically, rabbinic stories devise divine punishments which fit the crime. Yohanan's death is no exception. Yohanan dies when the rabbis

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mercifully pray for his death, a punishment which is the mirror image of his crime of cruelly refusing to pray for Resh Lakish's life.

The story is also preoccupied with sublimation and its role in the life of the scholar. As Daniel Boyarin observes, Resh Lakish is sexually attracted to the effeminate Yohanan, whom he sees bathing in the Jordan River and mistakes for a woman. He vaults after him on his lance, phallic imagery which symbolizes Resh Lakish's unbridled virility. He takes on a life of scholarship, losing his strength in the process, and marries Yohanan's sister. His raw physical strength and sexual virility are diverted into rabbinically acceptable channels: a heterosexual relationship, a passion for Torah study, and devoted discipleship of his teacher.¹⁰

Upon becoming a scholar, Resh Lakish does not lose his passion, but submerges and redirects it, as shown by the vehemence of his halakhic dispute with Yohanan. The passion which makes one a great brigand, the story teaches, also makes one a great Torah scholar. The study house and the battlefield are similar arenas. Debates in the study house are a matter of life and death, every bit as dangerous as a fight to the death between brigands. Rabbis discuss knives and daggers and don't use them, yet their words can kill no less effectively than can actual weapons.

The opinions of the two scholars very likely constitute more than a "simple" halakhic debate. Rather, they express the importance of sublimation as a key to understanding the story. Talmudic narratives often center around arcane issues of ritual purity, making the point that even ostensibly inoperative areas of Jewish law are crucially important, so much so that even God is a vitally interested participant in the discussion.¹¹

In the present instance, the halakhic debate is analagous to the human conflict between Yohanan and Resh Lakish. Yohanan thinks Resh Lakish is "complete" when he has become "forged in the fire," i.e., red hot and passionate, on the edge of but not yet having achieved consummation. Resh Lakish wants more. He wants to cool the fire in water, to achieve consummation by uniting with Yohanan, by attaining near-equality with him and coming as close as possible to full identification with his teacher. Homoerotic sexual attraction fuels this desire, although my claim is not that Resh Lakish consciously wants to have sex with his teacher. Resh Lakish reveals through his halakhic opinion that he is as hungry for consummation now as when he first encountered Yohanan in the river, and is unable to endure the life of continual sublimation demanded by his teacher. Resh Lakish's opinion is symptomatic of dissatisfaction with the role assigned to him by Yohanan, a fact which Yohanan perceives and which accounts in part for the intensity of his reaction to Resh Lakish's halakhic opinion.

Very likely, it is no accident that Resh Lakish pursues Yohanan into a river and Yohanan sees to it that Resh Lakish leaves the river. Yohanan is fully complete; he has cooled himself in water. Resh Lakish is not, but passionately wants to be, just like his teacher.

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To summarize, the Yohanan—Resh Lakish story does not portray events as they actually happened. The story is historical, however, in the sense that it attests to (1) Babylonian polemics against Palestinian rabbis or schools;¹² (2) efforts by Palestinian rabbis to win converts to the rabbinic way of life from among the non-rabbinic Jewish population; and (3) Babylonian rabbinic unease over the superficial nature of these conversions.¹³

As noted above, this book will attempt to draw historical conclusions based on ancient rabbinic literature, in particular to describe important aspects of the rabbis' relationships with non-rabbis in late antique Palestine and Babylonia. The Yohanan-Resh Lakish story provides the first of several proofs that Palestinian rabbis tend to be closely involved with individual non-rabbis, while Babylonian rabbis tend to avoid contact with such individuals. Palestinian rabbis sometimes admit converts to the rabbinic lifestyle into their midst; Babylonian rabbis tend not to.

THE ANCIENT RABBI IN THEIR HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THEIR ROLE IN PERSIAN AND GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY

This book advances the historical claim that Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis occupied different places in society. Babylonian rabbis interacted with non-rabbis in a variety of formal settings, for example as judges with litigants, teachers with students, employers with employees and the like, but rarely in informal contexts: as guests for dinner at the non-rabbi's house, via casual contact in the streets and marketplaces, as invited guests at the same party and the like. Babylonian rabbis allowed themselves to be approached by non-rabbis in a small number of carefully circumscribed contexts, but for the most part they drew a tight circle around themselves from which they rarely ventured and into which they admitted only a select few. Babylonian rabbis avoided casual contact with non-rabbis for fear it would lead to more intimate contact and would compromise their highly prized genealogical superiority.

Palestinian rabbis, in contrast, more frequently interacted with other members of Palestinian society in formal and informal contexts. Palestinian rabbis interacted with (1) non-rabbinic Jews, both common people and aristocrats, and (2) non-Jews and heretics who shared the rabbis' preoccupation with the Bible but differed with them over its proper interpretation.

This description of the role of Babylonian rabbis in society contrasts sharply with the conventional view, eloquently articulated by Jacob Neusner:

The rabbis were in constant communication with the masses, not only in the court, but also in the synagogue, in the streets, in the common life. The academies were not situated in the back-

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country, or, like monasteries, in inaccessible places. They were found in the towns and the villages where the masses of Jews lived. The rabbis were not seeking isolation, but communal leadership, and there is absolutely no equivalent in Babylonian Judaism to the Christian phenomenon of anchoritism and encratism. The rabbi was a holy man, but he was never on that account a separatist.... The rabbi... aspired to transform the ordinary people into "rabbis." It was this aspiration which most of all brought him into close and constant contact with the masses.¹⁴

Neusner continues: "It is clear...that the rabbinate did not form a caste, for it was...open to all who qualified.... The rabbinate's social ideal...had nothing in common with the aspirations of a caste."¹⁵

Neusner's words are appropriate as a description of the twentieth century American rabbinate. However, as this book will seek to show they are not appropriate as a characterization of the rabbinic movement in Sasanian Persia.

The distinction observed throughout this book between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis is not discernible in cases where the non-rabbis involved were simply too powerful to ignore. Babylonian rabbis could not turn their backs on the exilarch,¹⁶ for example, nor could they ignore Persian aristocrats and government officials who wished to interact with them. We therefore exclude such relationships from consideration, and for the same reason we exclude depictions of forced interactions between rabbis and non-rabbis, for example when rabbis are victimized by thieves or threatened with attack. In all of these instances, the element of compulsion distinguishes the relationship from those that form the focus of this study.

In addition, relations between Babylonian rabbis and either the exilarch or Persian officials clearly differ from rabbinic relationships with the less powerful because it was to the advantage of Babylonian rabbis to interact with the most powerful members of society. Even had they been able to avoid the exilarch or Persian officials, it would have not been in their best interest to do so. The fact that Babylonian rabbis interacted occasionally with the most powerful members of society does not therefore contradict the claim that they tended to avoid contact with the less powerful.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the differences between the societal role of the two rabbinic communities. Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis are not polar opposites; they exhibit diverse tendencies rather than totally different ways of relating to non-rabbis. It will be helpful to expand upon this point.

Palestinian sources portray a rabbinic movement struggling with opposing impulses. On the one hand, Palestinian rabbis wish to strengthen their precarious status and be counted among the leaders of Jewish society. They

recognize that to do so they must reach out to non-rabbis and appeal to them for support. On the other hand, Palestinian sources also depict a rabbinic movement which wishes to have little to do with non-rabbis, and which wishes to avoid sullyng itself through contact with wealthy sinners and aristocratic ignoramuses.

Babylonian sources, in contrast, depict a rabbinic movement more secure in its social position, less economically dependent on outsiders, and more powerful than its Palestinian counterpart. This portrayal, I will argue, is most likely reflective of social reality, in spite of the fact that the Babylonian rabbinic self-portrayal is very likely a slight "improvement" upon reality, an idealization which slightly masks the extent to which Babylonian rabbis, like their Palestinian brethren, had to cultivate relationships with non-rabbis to survive and flourish in society.

In other words, I accept the basic historicity of the Talmud's portrayal of differing Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis, but I question whether the demands of everyday life permitted Babylonian rabbis to be quite as aloof from non-rabbis as the sources suggest. How did they support themselves? Were they all wealthy? (Numerous sources suggest that they were not.¹⁷) Were they really self-sufficient enough to be able to avoid so thoroughly the company of non-rabbis? My guess is that they were not.

The precise extent of the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis is therefore unclear, but the existence of a substantial difference seems to me undeniable. Isaiah Gafni similarly claims that the rabbis were dominant in Babylonian Jewish society, controlling most of the positions of communal leadership. In contrast, he argues, the leadership of Palestinian society, like that of the Greek and Roman world in general, was also drawn from the ranks of wealthy aristocrats in the local municipalities.¹⁸ The sage in Palestine, in other words, tended to be politically weaker than his Babylonian counterpart.

Structure of Persian and Roman society

Why do the two rabbinic movements differ regarding the extent to which they sought isolation from non-rabbis? Distinctions between Roman and Persian society hold an important clue. To be specific, Jewish society in both Palestine and Babylonia is similar to, and likely to have been influenced by, the structure of the dominant culture, Greco-Roman or Persian, within which the rabbis flourished. So Babylonian rabbinic obsession with genealogy, a crucially important factor motivating the rabbis' detachment from society, corresponds to the attitude of the Persians toward lineage and to the rigid hierarchical divisions between classes in Iranian society. Class distinctions in the Roman Empire were less pronounced than in Persia, and the more

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intimate involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis was one manifestation of this empire-wide phenomenon. Perhaps the most striking illustration is the imperial decree of 212 CE conferring citizenship on all free inhabitants of the Roman Empire.¹⁹ Differences between the Persian and Roman Empires, should not, of course, be exaggerated and it would be a mistake to press this point too far.²⁰

Richard Frye writes:

Divisions in society were normal in the Near East and by no means restricted to the caste-conscious Indians or the Zoroastrian Iranians. For example, Strabo (XI. 501) speaks of four “castes” among the Georgians: the rulers, priests, soldiers, and the common people.... When the Zoroastrian church became firmly established in Iran it contributed to the fixing of social classes in accordance with religious tradition. As is well known, society was later divided into four classes, the priests, warriors, scribes, and common folk.²¹

To argue that rabbinic portrayals of relationships between rabbis and non-rabbis have no basis in historical reality, therefore, is to claim that Jewish society was unique in the Persian Empire. Given societal norms in the Near East of late antiquity, it is more reasonable to claim that the Jews were no different from anyone else, and that the burden of proof rests on those who would argue otherwise.

By contrast, late antique Roman society exhibited egalitarian tendencies largely absent from Persia.²² Peter Brown writes that in late Roman society membership of the governing class came to be determined more and more by education rather than heredity. Education thus became an effective means by which to raise one’s social status.²³

It will be helpful to elaborate upon these brief remarks. The Avesta, an ancient Zoroastrian holy book, divides society into three classes, the highest of which included priests.²⁴ During the Sasanian period, a fourth class was added and the highest class still included Zoroastrian church leaders.²⁵ Zoroastrian priests resembled the rabbis insofar as they were religious and political leaders on the one hand and judges on the other. The various classes within Persian society were distinguished by their special dress, titles, and seals, all of which were used to distinguish Babylonian rabbis as well.²⁶

Like the rabbis in Babylonia, “Iranian society placed great value upon family and descent (*gohar*).” According to the *Shah-nama*,

In the course of the long verbal battle between Khusrau II and his rebel general, Bahram, Khusrau repeatedly taunts Bahram with his low birth, and asserts the legitimacy of his own claim to the throne on the basis of his royal lineage. Bahram counters by casting aspersions on the king’s birth, and by referring to the forefather of

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the Sasanians as a mere shepherd, claiming for himself descent from the legendary warriors Arish and Milad. Shirin, the beloved mistress and, later, wife of Khusrau II, is rejected by the king's counsellors on the grounds that she would weaken the king's descendants by her plebeian blood. Khusrau I's chief argument against the Mazdakites is that their doctrine would obliterate the distinction between men of high birth and people of humble origin.²⁷

One way to visualize the rigidity of Persian society is to describe the extremism of movements which arose in reaction to the status quo. Otakar Klima writes,

Manicheism appeared to Zoroastrian priests as a danger to the ruling classes. It was composed of diverse ethnic and social groups bound together by religious beliefs and therefore freed from all fetters of the inherited Persian social structure and raised above traditional views about class division. In Mani's church, two chief divisions co-existed.... One was that of the Elect, a kind of mendicant aristocracy.... The Elect did no work, had no families, no possessions; they lived only from charity and felt themselves free of the world and its painful existence. On the other hand, the Auditors, the common folk, had all the things of this world in abundance: work, wives, children, possessions.²⁸

Another extremist reaction to the established order was the Mazdakite movement, which arose in Persia at the end of the fifth century CE and which called for shared ownership of possessions and the complete breakdown of traditional family structures and hierarchical social divisions. Ghirshman writes that the appeal of the Mazdakite movement

lay in its social theories, which called for equality in the distribution of goods. In a society like that of the Sassanian Empire, in which the various classes were in water-tight compartments, where the plebeian could never hope to raise himself above the station into which he was born, where the social system was based on the family, property, and rigid class distinction, the programme put forward by Mazdak was revolutionary.... Certain scholars explain it as a reaction of the slave, or the peasants who become semi-slaves, and of the formerly free population of town and country against feudalism and its enslaving system.²⁹

Modern scholars have described Persia's class structure as a caste system, although one less rigid than that of India.³⁰ Ehsan Yarshater contends,

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Although class distinction did not develop perhaps into quite as rigid a caste system as in India, nevertheless the barriers between the estates...were by no means easy to cross, particularly those between the commoners and the privileged classes. In *The Letter of Tansar* the founder of the Sasanian dynasty is quoted as having proclaimed that “nothing needs such guarding as degree among men,” and is said to have established “a visible and general distinction between men of noble birth and common people with regard to horses and clothes, houses and gardens, women and servants...so no commoner may share the sources of enjoyment of life with the nobles, and alliance and marriage between the two groups is forbidden.”³¹

Yarshater further writes,

A strict observance of distinction between the social classes...was considered a necessary condition for a stable and orderly society, since nothing could undermine the social order more than class confusion and elimination of class differentiation.... The theory was that men of low birth, even if they acquired the necessary skills, were not fit to handle the responsibilities of men of noble birth, and so it was incumbent upon kings to preserve the purity of the higher classes. Thus, it was invariably understood that the people must be kept to their own stations and might not aspire to cross the lines of social class.³²

The Talmudic picture of self-imposed Babylonian rabbinic separation from most non-rabbis conforms to that of the dominant Persian culture. Thus the structure of Jewish society in Babylonia, with its division between rabbis and other groups, resembles the structure of Persian society.

Along the same lines, movement within classes was also extremely difficult in both Persian and rabbinic society.³³ I have argued elsewhere that the Babylonian rabbinic movement was characterized by an extremely rigid hierarchy, with distinctions drawn not only between students and teachers but also between one teacher and another. There was no such thing as a collegial relationship between teachers of equal status, but rather between superior and inferior teachers.³⁴ Hierarchical relationships between rabbis in Babylonia tended to be static, so that once one's status vis-à-vis other rabbis had been determined, little could be done to change it.³⁵

The structures of Persian and Roman society, therefore, strongly resemble those of Jewish society in the two localities. Further support for this claim is given by the extremely decentralized nature of the Persian Empire and the Babylonian rabbinic movement, as opposed to the greater centralization of

Rome and rabbinic society in Palestine. Palestinian and Babylonian sources depicting rabbinic responses to the threat of communal disaster illustrate this point. Palestinian sources on the subject of threatened communal disaster tend to portray cooperative ventures involving two or more of the leading sages of their generation. Sometimes the sages come from different localities but join together in response to communal emergency. Stories about Babylonians, in contrast, depict a single dominant rabbi acting without the support or cooperation of his colleagues, at most accompanied by a student or a group of students.³⁶

The following discussion first documents these trends and then attempts to explain in what ways the structure of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic society corresponds to that of Rome and Persia.

We see evidence of Palestinian rabbinic centralization, for example, on *y. Taanit* 2:1 (65a–b), which describes R.Ba bar Zavda, R.Tanhum bar Ila, and R.Yoshaya “going out to a fast” in an effort to bring rain during a time of drought. The three Palestinian sages lecture in the presence of R.Hiyya, R. Isi, and R.Imi. Such a “crowd” of sages, three of whom share center stage, is unprecedented in stories about Babylonian rabbis.³⁷

In addition, *t. Taanit* 2:5 describes a fast during a time of drought declared on Hanukkah in the city of Lud. R.Yehoshua and R.Eliezer deliberately violate the fast, implying that they would have participated had they considered the fast to be valid.³⁸ Elsewhere, *y. Taanit* 3:4 (66c) depicts R.Yehoshua ben Levi journeying from southern Israel to help R.Hanina lead the people of Sepphoris in fasting and prayer.

The Bavli’s portrayal of Palestinian rabbis is substantially the same. A parallel version of the latter story, on *b. Taanit* 25a, describes a communal fast led by R.Hama bar Haninah and R.Yehoshua ben Levi, two Palestinian rabbis from diverse localities. In addition, according to *b. Taanit* 24a Resh Lakish and R.Yohanan learn that the patriarch declared a fast the previous day. The two Palestinian sages debate whether or not to join the patriarchal fast,³⁹ which implies that had they known of the fast from its inception they would have been obliged to participate.

Along these same lines, *b. Nedarim* 49b depicts R.Yehuda’s failure to take part in a fast declared during a time of drought by Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel. The story presupposes joint participation and cooperation among Palestinian sages and describes difficulties which arise when the normal pattern breaks down and rabbis fail to cooperate.

What situation do the Babylonian sources presuppose? According to two narratives on *b. Taanit* 21b, for example, Shmuel and Rav Nahman declare fasts in response to epidemics in other localities.⁴⁰ Shmuel and Rav Nahman, unlike their Palestinian counterparts, do not participate and are not expected to participate in the fasts of other rabbis and other communities. Instead, the sources portray them declaring independent fasts and worrying only about their own local communities.⁴¹

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Similarly, Babylonian rabbis in their own localities, part of a city, an entire city, or a city and its environs, presided over their own “fiefdoms.” Their hierarchical position was clear vis-à-vis students and subordinates with whom they came in regular contact and with whom they lived in geographical proximity. Their hierarchical status vis-à-vis the heads of other rabbinic fiefdoms was extremely ill-defined, a fact which led to quarrels and confusion on the infrequent occasions when two dominant rabbis met face-to-face.⁴²

Very likely, this distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian sources is evidence of the extremely decentralized character of the rabbinic movement in Babylonia⁴³ and its more centralized character in Palestine. This distinction probably reflects in part the differing roles and authority of the Palestinian patriarch and the Babylonian exilarch. The patriarch in Palestine presided over institutions which linked diverse rabbis from diverse localities; the exilarch in Babylonia did not unify the rabbinic movement to the same degree.⁴⁴

The feudal character of the Persian government during the Parthian and Sasanian periods very likely accounts in part for the extremely decentralized character of the rabbinic “movement” in Babylonia.⁴⁵ Jacob Neusner, describing Parthia, writes,

The great noble families, assembling their own armies, were influential in the conduct of imperial affairs. Thus although titles were confused and it is impossible to ascertain specific levels of power and authority represented by various honorifics, feudalism does provide the most useful analogy for understanding Parthian government, even though a systematic feudal structure cannot be discerned.⁴⁶

Persia during the Sasanian period was characterized by gradually increasing centralization in the political and religious sphere, but in the words of Ehsan Yarshater,

Ardashir did not in actual fact break with the Parthian norms so abruptly. The great inscription of Shapur I at Ka’aba-yi Zardusht [= the Kaba of Zoroaster] does not confirm an all-out effort by either Ardashir or Shapur to centralize political and military power. On the contrary, the dignitaries of the great houses who were prominent during Parthian times joined the Sasanian court, and the titles of the provincial kings were preserved, although now borne mostly by Sasanian princes.

Khusrau I and his father Kavād, later Sasanian kings, attempted to effect “a more tightly organized governmental structure, with the king of kings grasping the reins of power firmly, while the authority of the nobility was

impaired.” In reality, continues Yarshater, the differences between the Parthian and Sasanian dynasties in this area were not as great as some of the Sasanian documents would suggest, since

to impart authority to his policies, Khusrau attributed them, as the “Letter of Tansar” shows, to Ardashir and transferred opposite practices to the Arsacids. This view of the Arsacids must have been emphasized even further after Khusrau II as a defensive measure against the prevailing political chaos and repeated challenges to the central authority of the Sasanian state.⁴⁷

Perikhanian writes that “political centralization appears to have been achieved in Iran only at the end of the Sasanian epoch.” Bernard Lewis claims that “the Persian Empire at the end of the sixth century had just emerged from a revolutionary convulsion, in the course of which the old feudal structure was broken up and replaced by a military despotism with a mercenary army.”⁴⁸

The Roman Empire, while hardly a modern nation-state, was substantially more centralized than the government in Persia, and very likely the structure of the rabbinic movement in Palestine was influenced by centralizing trends in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire “was evolving toward a powerful central government under a monarch who held a virtual monopoly of real power.”⁴⁹

Isaiah Gafni describes the phenomenon of local patriotism among Babylonian rabbis, their sense of connectedness to localities within Babylonia.⁵⁰ The stories above, which depict Babylonian rabbis preoccupied with local communities, but not with Babylonian Jewry as a whole, lend weight to Gafni’s claim. The strength of Babylonian rabbinic local patriotism is very likely another example of how the loose structure of the Persian government influenced that of the rabbinic movement. This is not to deny the existence of a rabbinic consciousness of Babylonia as an entity transcending local boundaries, just as the forces that contributed to the feudal character of the Persian Empire did not totally eclipse the idea of Persia as an entity transcending ethnic, religious, and provincial boundaries.

The centralization described in the Palestinian sources, however, should not be overemphasized. The stories cited above depict Palestinian rabbis meeting together in response to crisis, and their gatherings are *ad hoc* and brief. Once the crisis is averted, R. Yehoshua ben Levi returns to the south and R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish leave the patriarchal court. The Palestinian situation described above is “centralized” compared to the highly fragmented Babylonian situation, but neither Babylonians nor Palestinians comprise a tightly knit movement or class, according to the sources examined here.⁵¹

DIVERSE FICTIONALIZED CREATIONS OR ACCURATE REFLECTIONS OF HISTORY?

Even without the correspondence between the rabbinic evidence and the larger Roman and Persian context, it would be difficult to view the differing portrayals of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis as diverse fictionalized creations. The theory is problematic because it is preferable to explain related phenomena via a single principle rather than by means of diverse *ad hoc* explanations. In subsequent chapters I collect numerous sources which depict (1) Babylonian rabbinic obsession with genealogy versus a relative lack of concern for the issue on the part of Palestinian rabbis; (2) Palestinian rabbinic appeals to non-rabbinic Jews for financial support, marriage ties, and social advancement versus the absence of such appeals in Babylonian sources; and (3) Palestinian rabbinic contacts with Christians and Bible-reading heretics versus Babylonian rabbinic avoidance of such contacts.⁵² These and other findings documented throughout this book yield a convincing portrayal of (a) Palestinian rabbinic societal weakness versus greater Babylonian power; and (b) Babylonian rabbinic tendency to keep a distance from non-rabbis versus a Palestinian rabbinic tendency to seek out such contact. It therefore makes little sense to explain the phenomena other than as accurate reflections of Babylonian rabbinic societal roles.

In addition, were our characterization of the two rabbinic movements based on one or two traditions preserved in only a single rabbinic compilation, one could argue that they were the fictional creations of a storyteller or an editor. The fact that numerous traditions preserved in diverse compilations depict the two rabbinic movements in the same fashion increases the likelihood that the portrayals are not fictional. How might such a fiction have imposed itself on individual rabbinic compilations, characterized in innumerable respects by diversity and contradiction? How might such a fiction have travelled from document to document, given that these documents are even more diverse and contradictory? Neither of these questions is readily answerable, making it unlikely that the agreement within and between rabbinic documents is attributable to the design of a single author or a group of authors with similar world-views.

My point, it bears emphasizing, is not that rabbinic traditions describe events exactly as they took place. Important aspects of them are clearly exaggerations and idealizations. Their depiction, however, of (1) differing relationships between rabbis and non-rabbis, and (2) diverse levels of power in the hands of non-rabbis, very likely has a basis in reality.

RABBINIC SCRIPTURAL EXEGESIS IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To reiterate, Part One of this book will conclude that Babylonian rabbis, in conformity to Persian models, distanced themselves from most non-rabbis and interacted with them primarily in formal contexts. Palestinian rabbis were more intimately involved with individual non-rabbis and interacted with them in both formal and informal settings. Even granting a Babylonian rabbinic attempt to idealize reality by depicting rabbis as independent of their non-rabbinic inferiors, the contrast between Palestinian and Babylonian society is clear. Part Two of this book builds on the conclusions of Part One and argues that these conclusions help explain several distinctions between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic comments about biblical heroes. Some of the distinctions between Palestinian and Babylonian scriptural commentary are explicable in more than one fashion, but only one explanation, that based on Part One, accounts for them all. As noted above, it is preferable to account for related phenomena by means of a single principle rather than via several *ad hoc* explanations.

The best argument in favor of any theory is the ability of that theory to account for or predict diverse phenomena. The success of the conclusions of Part One in explaining the data assembled in Part Two, therefore, is an important argument in their favor.

Part Two attempts to place rabbinic scriptural interpretations in a historical context. Rabbinic interpretations of scripture were motivated not only by a desire to explicate the biblical text but also by social, cultural, religious, polemical, and/or apologetic concerns. This thesis is by no means self-evident, and the discussion that follows here compares Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic attitudes toward Ezra in an attempt to establish its plausibility.

Ezra

A noteworthy feature of rabbinic commentary about Ezra in the Bavli is the preponderance of statements attributed to Babylonian Amoraim. Scholars have long been aware that midrash, even that preserved in the Bavli, is predominantly Palestinian.⁵³ The case of Ezra is exceptional, however, since the Bavli attributes 26 to 29 statements to Babylonian Amoraim,⁵⁴ 9 or 10 statements to Tannaim,⁵⁵ and only 6 to 9 statements to Palestinian Amoraim.⁵⁶

The Yerushalmi, incidentally, preserves 7 statements by Tannaim,⁵⁷ 9 or 10 statements by Palestinian Amoraim,⁵⁸ and only 2 or 3 statements by Babylonian Amoraim.⁵⁹ The Yerushalmi in general is much sparser in scriptural commentary than is the Bavli, a phenomenon we will examine in greater detail in the concluding chapter.⁶⁰ The paucity of rabbinic comments about Ezra in the Yerushalmi, therefore, is not at all surprising, but it is

noteworthy that relevant comments by Babylonian Amoraim are much more prevalent in the Bavli than in the Yerushalmi.

The ensuing discussion argues that Babylonian Amoraim approve of Ezra, who according to the Bible traveled from Persia to Israel as the leader of a large group of settlers. He is horrified to learn that Israelite men who returned from Babylonia mingled with the people of the land, people who Ezra considers genealogically unfit. He convinces the Babylonian returnees to avert God's wrath by divorcing their wives.⁶¹

Palestinian Amoraim, on the other hand, minimize the importance of a Babylonian leader (Ezra) who takes for granted the genealogical superiority of the returning Israelite community. Palestinian Amoraim are less enchanted with Ezra because of competition with Babylonian Amoraim.⁶² As we shall see, Babylonian Amoraim are consistently enthusiastic about a biblical hero who is "their own," and Palestinian Amoraim are less than enthusiastic about a biblical figure who reminded them of irritating Babylonian claims of superiority. To test this theory, we need to delve beneath the statistics and examine the content of rabbinic commentary about Ezra.⁶³

The Bavli uses Ezra to polemicize against Palestinian sages, learning, and practices, and to respond to accusations leveled at Babylonians by Palestinian sages. On b. Megillah 16b, for example, Rav claims that Torah study is greater than the building of the Temple,⁶⁴ since Ezra did not go to Israel as long as his teacher, Barukh ben Neriah, was still alive. This statement justifies Babylonians who did not resettle in Palestine when the second Temple was built, and probably also justifies Babylonians who did not move to Palestine during the rabbis' own era. Torah study takes precedence over the building of the Temple and study with one's own teacher in Babylonia takes precedence over study with an inferior teacher in Israel.

In addition, b. Yoma 9b–10a preserves a Babylonian response to Palestinian propaganda directed at Babylonians. According to this story, Resh Lakish insults Rabbah bar bar Hana,⁶⁵ who began his career in Babylonia and subsequently moved to Palestine. Resh Lakish claims that God hates Babylonians because they failed to settle *en masse* in Palestine during the time of Ezra. Resh Lakish goes to his superior,⁶⁶ R. Yohanan, who says that the Divine Presence did not rest on the second Temple because it was built by descendants of Yafet (the Persians) and not by descendants of Shem (the Jews). According to Yohanan, God has no reason to hate the Babylonians. Their ancestors did no wrong when they remained in Babylonia since the second Temple lacked the Divine Presence.

The fact that Yohanan, the superior, has the final word suggests strongly that his opinion prevails over that of his subordinate, Resh Lakish. This conclusion is strengthened by the story's opening lines, which describe Resh Lakish bathing in the Jordan River, Rabbah bar bar Hana extending him a helping hand, and receiving a tactless insult instead of thanks for his kind gesture.⁶⁷

Yoma 9b–10a, in other words, is a response to the following Palestinian charges: (a) Babylonians sinned when they failed to settle in Israel during the time of Ezra; (b) Babylonians during rabbinic times share in the guilt of their ancestors; and very likely (c) Babylonians during rabbinic times sin by their refusal to settle in Palestine. The Babylonian response is all the more effective by being placed in the mouths of prominent Palestinian sages. The Palestinians themselves, claim the story's authors, refute Palestinian claims of Babylonian wrongdoing.⁶⁸

B.Sukkah 20a also attributes a pro-Babylonian comment about Ezra to a Palestinian Amora. According to this tradition, Resh Lakish is a great proponent of Babylonian scholarly supremacy.⁶⁹ He claims that “at first, when Torah had been forgotten in Israel, Ezra ascended from Babylonia and established it. It was again forgotten and Hillel the Babylonian ascended and established it. It was again forgotten and R.Hiyya and his sons ascended and established it.” At critical moments in Jewish history, Babylonian sages rescue the Torah from oblivion in Palestine.⁷⁰

Another Palestinian Amora, R.Elazar, ostensibly asserts Babylonian genealogical supremacy on b. Kiddushin 69b.⁷¹ According to this tradition, Elazar claims that Ezra did not leave Babylonia until he rendered it “choice flour,” i.e., genealogically pure. This opinion, together with the mishnah's assertion that people of various levels of genealogical purity moved to Israel from Babylonia, means that Babylonian genealogy is impeccable while that of Palestine is suspect. Here as well, Babylonian authors or editors most likely attribute a Babylonian sentiment to an important Palestinian rabbi, producing effective pro-Babylonian propaganda.⁷²

Analysis of the content of rabbinic comments about Ezra, therefore, yields evidence that the Bavli made polemical use of statements attributed to Palestinian Amoraim. In addition, the comparatively large number of Babylonian comments about Ezra (see above) very likely indicates Babylonian approval of a native son who made good in the holy land, and the small number of Palestinian comments probably indicates Palestinian aversion to this Babylonian hero.

Tannaitic literature, however, contains no evidence of Palestinian aversion to Ezra,⁷³ which I would argue is due to the fact that during the Tannaitic period, Babylonia had not yet emerged as a competitor to Palestine for preeminence in the rabbinic world of late antiquity. A biblical character who hails from Persia, therefore, and who presupposes the superiority of Babylonian Jewry is not perceived as a threat by Palestinian Tannaim, since there was no significant Babylonian rabbinic threat to their hegemony. Babylonia emerges as a major competitor only during the Amoraic period and it is at this point that we begin to see the use of Ezra in polemical contexts.

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Esther

Along these same lines, Babylonian rabbis composed a sustained midrashic commentary on the book of Esther, the Persian-Jewish queen, and incorporated it into the Babylonian Talmud (see below). This midrashic work is unlike other midrashic material, even that found in the Bavli, which as noted above is primarily of Palestinian authorship. Once again, a Babylonian Jewish hero(ine) is of intense concern to Babylonian Amoraim and of surprisingly little concern to Palestinian Amoraim.

In this and in other cases, examined in Part Two of this book, the Amoraim do not simply respond to scriptural cues in their commentary on the Bible; they act not only as exegetes but also as polemicists.

Elijah

Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic statements about Elijah further support our claim that scriptural exegesis is explicable in historical terms.⁷⁴ The following discussion argues that Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis responded differently to Elijah's biblical career because of differences between the *Sitz im Leben* of the two communities.

The Yerushalmi preserves 24 statements and stories about Elijah, 22 of which are definitely attributed to Palestinian rabbis and 2 of which are attributed either to Palestinian or to Babylonian rabbis.⁷⁵ The Bavli preserves 39 statements and stories about Elijah, 23 of which are attributed to Palestinian rabbis,⁷⁶ 15 are attributed to Babylonians, and 1 is of uncertain origin.⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, both Talmuds attribute a majority of statements about Elijah to Palestinian rabbis. Also not surprisingly, the proportion of Palestinian statements is much higher in the Yerushalmi than in the Bavli.

More than three-fifths of the relevant statements are preserved in the Bavli, in keeping with this Talmud's tendency to be richer in scriptural commentary. The two Talmuds preserve a total of 63 statements and stories about Elijah, 45 to 48 of which are attributed to Palestinian rabbis and 15 to 18 of which are attributed to Babylonian rabbis.

Palestinian sources in both Talmuds sometimes criticize Elijah, but Babylonian sources do not.⁷⁸ Palestinian rabbis criticize or belittle Elijah in the following contexts:

- 1 On y. Taanit 1:1 (63c–d), R. Yudah bar Pazi comments on 1 Kings 17:20: “[Elijah] cried out to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord my God, will You bring evil upon this widow, whose guest I am, by killing her son?’” Yudah bar Pazi compares Elijah to a man who steals a doctor's bag, finds that his son has been injured, and returns to the doctor and asks him to heal his son. The doctor tells him to “go and return my bag,

which contains all kinds of medicine, and I will cure your son.” Elijah vowed that the dew should not fall, and he now wants God to resurrect the widow’s son, despite the fact that “the dead live only by means of the dew” and Elijah has “stolen” God’s power to heal when he vowed that the dew shall not fall. He is a thief who has the gall to request help from the “doctor” from whom he stole, but the theft has rendered impossible the cure he now desperately seeks.

- 2 According to y. Sanhedrin 10:1 (28a), R.Shimon ben Lakish criticizes Elijah as one of three prophets who “deny their prophecy.” Elijah complains that if God does not accept his offering in the presence of the people and the priests of Baal, He will have “turned their hearts backward” (1 Kings 18:37) and publicly demonstrated that Elijah is not His prophet.⁷⁹
- 3 On b. Berakhot 31b–32a, R.Elazar states that “Elijah reproached God,” using a term (*hitiah*) that literally means “to throw,” and which denotes overly harsh and disrespectful criticism of God by a human being.⁸⁰ According to R.Elazar, Elijah’s claim, “You have turned their hearts backward” (1 Kings 18:37) goes beyond what a human being should say to God.
- 4 On b. Sanhedrin 113a, “a certain Galilean” in the presence of Rav Hisda comments on Elijah’s vow that “there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding” (1 Kings 17:11). Later on in the same chapter, Elijah is powerless to help when the son of the woman of ʔarefath falls sick (1 Kings 17:17). Elijah’s behavior, observes the Galilean, is comparable to that of “a man who locks the door and loses the key.” Elijah caused the drought and famine which presumably brought on the boy’s illness, yet he is unable to save him and must turn to God for help. At some point between 1 Kings 17:1 and 17:17, Elijah loses the power to control rain, and in retrospect his words at the beginning of the chapter seem like a hollow boast.
- 5 Finally, on b. Sanhedrin 113a–b, R.Yosi states publicly in the city of Sepphoris that “father Elijah is hot-tempered.”

Elijah’s role in withholding rain and dew is of central importance to the Palestinian sources surveyed above. Two sources explicitly criticize him for causing drought and belatedly trying to remedy the situation (nos 1 and 4), and two others (nos 2 and 3) focus on his harshly worded prayer in the presence of the king, the people, and the priests of Baal. The background to Elijah’s prayer is the drought sent as punishment for Israel’s idolatry. Elijah prays for the defeat of the priests and followers of Baal, which will end the drought and return the nation to normal (1 Kings 18:1–46). His anxiety about the possible public failure of his prayer leads to inappropriate behavior toward God, and the rabbis criticize his angry response to the prospect of the triumph of the priests of Baal and his own public humiliation. The fifth source (no. 5) does

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not specify which actions by Elijah reveal his hot temper, but very likely the issues are the same: (1) the drought caused by Elijah, and (2) the disrespect he displays toward God in his prayer for the drought to end.⁸¹

Drought was a recurring problem in Palestine which the rabbis and miracle workers, with mixed results, addressed by praying to God, controlling nature, and exhorting a sinful community to change its ways. Some Palestinian rabbis disapprove of Elijah's use of drought as a weapon against the Israelites and criticize his un-prophetic behavior in sources preserved in both Talmuds. Other Palestinian sources use Elijah as an example of how not to behave as a public leader confronted with a sinful people and an anxious populace depending on him to save them from catastrophe. The community leader should attempt to remedy the situation, but not by expressing anger or disrespect toward God.

Rabbinic Babylonia, in contrast, was much less dependent on rainfall, situated as it was between two major rivers which generally supplied the region with ample supplies of water.⁸² Elijah's prayer for drought, therefore, did not strike a raw nerve in Babylonia.

If the above analysis is correct, we see once again that the rabbis read the biblical text through the lens of their life experiences. Differences between the life settings of the Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic communities leave traces on the rabbis' statements about biblical heroes.

Having argued that scriptural exegesis is susceptible to analysis on historical grounds, it will be helpful to describe three outstanding examples of modern scholarly thought on this subject. James Kugel explains midrashic comments about Joseph's refusal to be seduced by Potiphar's wife as rabbinic responses to problematic features of the biblical text.⁸³ He writes,

The most basic root of rabbinic exegesis, or any exegesis, is the Bible itself. This may sound like a truism. But the fact is that some modern scholars, in their efforts to read midrashic texts with an eye to the historical situation reflected in them, or to explore the folkloristic side of midrash and connect its motifs with those of other cultures, have tended (however fruitful such studies may otherwise be in bringing out new insights) to obscure the basic fact that midrash is first and foremost biblical exegesis, an attempt to make sense of a more than occasionally difficult and fragmentary text. And so I have tried to make a point in this study of examining each midrashic tradition from the standpoint of the biblical text itself.⁸⁴

Similarly, Daniel Boyarin argues that midrash is first and foremost a hermeneutical enterprise. He carefully notes that while midrash should not be divorced from its historical setting, it cannot be reduced to a set of

“extratextual” motivations. According to Boyarin, political and polemical issues should be at best secondary in our attempts to understand midrash, and midrash’s self-presentation as scriptural commentary is an accurate indication of exactly what the rabbis were attempting to accomplish.⁸⁵

Steven Fraade phrases matters differently, but the difference is more one of emphasis than of substance. Fraade attempts to steer a middle course between the Scylla of over-reliance on the text as key to the understanding of midrash, in its most extreme form total ignorance of historical context as a means to understanding the text; and the Charybdis of exclusive reliance on history as key to a midrash’s meaning and total ignorance of its character as scriptural exegesis. Attention to both history and exegesis is necessary to do justice to midrash’s “outer-facing” and “inner-facing” character.⁸⁶

The present book agrees with the concern of these scholars that interpretation of midrash should strike a proper balance between history and exegesis. My own interest, however, lies primarily in the historical content of the material, for example the existence of tension between Palestinian and Babylonian Amoraim, the place of the rabbis in Jewish society, and the like. I am certainly not ignoring scripture, since the rabbis’ portrayal of Ezra as a proponent of Babylonian genealogical supremacy is solidly based on scripture. Nevertheless, it is fair to ask if I am justified in drawing historical conclusions without analyzing the Bible in detail for the possible exegetical basis of each one of the rabbis’ comments.

I believe I am justified in doing so because my conclusions in Part Two are not based on an attempt to describe the historical situation which gave rise to a particular statement or story based on scripture. Rather, I analyze large groups of traditions based on a wide variety of scriptural verses in an effort to describe recurring patterns and motifs in a large number of texts. These recurring patterns attest to widespread attitudes or preoccupations permeating the rabbinic cultures which produced our compositions deriving from late antiquity, and to social conditions presupposed by numerous texts deriving from a particular era or locality. Not once throughout this book do I claim that a specific event gave rise to a particular tradition; rather, I claim that disparate, independent texts attest to the same societal concern or phenomenon.⁸⁷

“Extra-textual” conclusions drawn on the basis of a single text or only a few texts are likely to be suspect for the reasons indicated above. Boyarin is likely to be correct that such conclusions are premature because they fail to do justice to the interpretive nature of the statements, to their character as responses to problems inherent in the biblical text. A larger number of statements based on a variety of scriptural verses which attest to the same phenomenon, however, are less likely to be suspect in this fashion. “Extratextual” factors are difficult to ignore in such cases, although it is important to note that our lack of explicit attention to detailed exegetical concerns should not be understood as a denial of their importance. It is simply an expression of the conviction that “extra-

textual” factors should likewise be given their due, and that the tendency of some scholars to rely too heavily and clumsily on such factors should not lead to the conclusion that exegetical factors alone are important.

**VERIFYING THE TALMUD’S GEOGRAPHICAL
AND CHRONOLOGICAL CLAIMS IN THE
ABSENCE OF EXTERNAL PARALLELS**

This book attempts to draw historical conclusions on the basis of rabbinic texts whose concerns are fundamentally ahistorical. Part One relies heavily on parallels between rabbinic and non-rabbinic evidence, but historical conclusions are far more problematic when sources outside the Talmuds do not corroborate Talmudic portrayals. Usually we have only the Talmuds’ word on a particular issue; how can we establish whether the text is a rabbinic fantasy or a disinterested description of reality?

A necessary first step in tackling this question is to determine whether the texts exhibit patterns which change according to the chronology or geography of the sources. Using chronological and geographical data supplied by the rabbinic documents, it is often possible to determine whether portrayals of institutions, rabbinic functions, or personalities change over time or differ from one rabbinic center to another.

The chronological and geographical data supplied by the Talmuds, while largely unverifiable from external sources, is strikingly consistent throughout rabbinic documents and from one rabbinic document to another. There is little reason to deny the accuracy of this information, and it is a useful tool for describing particular rabbis, generations, or periods.⁸⁸

Not only do isolated and scattered traditions derive from diverse times and places, but also, distinct layers and clusters of traditions often possess objectively definable characteristics which set them apart from other layers. These characteristics often correspond to and confirm the claims of rabbinic compilations that their component parts are (1) early or later, (2) Palestinian or Babylonian, or (3) anonymous or attributed.

This point is worth emphasizing, particularly since our discussion of Ezra above concluded that some sources in the Bavli place Babylonian viewpoints in the mouths of Palestinian rabbis. Some sources which the Bavli attributes to Palestinian rabbis, in other words, were either invented or tampered with by Babylonian authors or editors. Much work needs to be done to develop criteria to determine which sources attributed to Palestinian rabbis are authentically Palestinian and which are Babylonian inventions, and vice versa, but the various studies which comprise this book demonstrate time and again (but by no means always) that Palestinian sources are distinguishable from Babylonian sources, irrespective of whether they are recorded in the Bavli, the Yerushalmi, or in midrashic compilations.⁸⁹

CRITERIA FOR DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN RABBIS AND NON-RABBIS

Before we conclude this chapter, it is necessary to confront a methodological problem facing this study. In the Talmud it is often difficult to determine precisely who is a non-rabbi and who is a rabbi. For obvious reasons this hampers our efforts to describe rabbinic relations with non-rabbis. The presence or absence of the title “Rabbi,” “Rav,” or “Abba” introducing a person’s name is not a fully reliable indicator.⁹⁰ According to a story on b. Shabbat 121a–b, for example, Rav Yehuda, Rav Yirmiya bar Abba, and Rav Natan bar Rava visit Abin from Neshikaya. We might assume from the absence of the title “Rav” that Abin is not a rabbi, but the story describes him teaching a mishnah to his son. A person’s identification as *ha-hu gavra*, or “a certain man,” is likewise not conclusive proof of non-rabbinic status, since we find at least one case in which a man identified at the outset of a story as *ha-hu gavra* is referred to in the same story as a rabbi.⁹¹ Reference to a person in terms of his occupation is less than fully adequate proof, for we find at least one case in which a man identified as a “laundryman” at the outset of a story turns out to be knowledgeable in rabbinic traditions.⁹² To complicate matters further, the laundryman’s knowledge of rabbinic traditions does not guarantee his status as a rabbi, for at present we lack precise criteria for determining the difference between a low-level sage and a non-rabbi who possesses knowledge of rabbinic traditions (if indeed such a distinction was always clear to the rabbis themselves). Most likely, there existed a substantial gray area, leading to disagreements among the rabbis about whether or not particular individuals merited inclusion within the rabbinic movement. Finally, the portrayal of a man engaging in wicked behavior cannot be taken as proof of his status as a non-rabbi, for we find the case of Bar Hadaya, a dream interpreter, who is condemned for accepting payment for his services and for bringing about the death of Rava’s wife and children by means of his interpretations. Bar Hadaya suffers an extremely horrible death at the hands of the Roman government, represented as deserved punishment for his wicked behavior. However, other Talmudic contexts in which he appears make it likely that he is a rabbi, whom the authors of this one story hate bitterly, but who elsewhere engages in ordinary rabbinic activity with no hint of disapproval.⁹³

Granted all of these difficulties, I am convinced nevertheless that it is profitable to analyze rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis. The criteria mentioned in the preceding paragraph are not foolproof, but they are useful. A person’s identification as “a certain man” or as a “laundryman,” for instance, or depiction of his *extremely* wicked behavior (murder, for example, or adultery, or crimes against God), or of his ignorance of rabbinic and/or biblical traditions are, generally speaking, valid criteria for excluding him from the rabbinic movement. Conversely, when a man bears the title “Rav”

INTRODUCTION

or “Rabbi,” or displays knowledge of rabbinic traditions, or makes characteristically rabbinic statements,⁹⁴ we can be reasonably certain, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary,⁹⁵ that the man is a rabbi. The task is obviously easier where women, slaves, heretics, and non-Jews are concerned, since they are *ipso facto* not rabbis.

It is therefore likely that we will include a small amount of material which should be excluded and exclude other material which should be included. In most cases, however, the criteria above will yield the proper choice.

The most effective test of these criteria will be the fruitfulness of our results. Can we discern patterns and trends in the material and draw meaningful conclusions about differences between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic traditions? Do these patterns and trends conform to scholarly descriptions of literature and/or society throughout the Persian and Roman worlds? As indicated above, this book claims that the answer to both questions is “yes” and that we can draw conclusions about the history of the rabbinic movements, about relations between rabbis and non-rabbis, and about the role of the rabbi in Palestinian and Babylonian Jewish society in late antiquity.

Part I

HISTORICAL STUDIES

NON-RABBINIC JEWS

This chapter attempts to substantiate our claim that ancient rabbinic sources attest to (1) Palestinian involvement with, and Babylonian aloofness from, individual non-rabbis, and (2) the relatively weak position of Palestinian rabbis in society compared with the greater strength of Babylonian rabbis.¹ It attempts to show, through examination of unrelated sources scattered throughout several rabbinic documents, that rabbinic portrayals of relations between rabbis and non-rabbis can be used to describe social reality. Subsequent chapters will independently confirm the results of the present chapter, further strengthening our conclusions. The portrayal of rabbinic interactions with non-rabbis, in the area of concern to us here, follows the same pattern whether the source is preserved in the Yerushalmi, the Bavli, or in midrashic compilations.

The fact that diverse sources repeatedly yield this conclusion is a powerful argument in favor of it, particularly since these sources are scattered throughout the vast and variegated rabbinic compilations of late antiquity. Unless we wish to posit the activity of pseudepigraphers of astounding sophistication and thoroughness, the like of whom is encountered in no other literature of late antiquity, the only satisfactory interpretation of the evidence is that the rabbinic portrayals have a basis in historical reality.

To summarize: first, Palestinian sources frequently urge non-rabbinic Jews to give food, money, and shelter to rabbis and to marry their daughters to sages, but Babylonian sources do not. Second, Palestinian sources depict informal relations between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews: they casually greet one another in the street, dine together in each other's homes, and literally and figuratively touch one another. Babylonian sages, in contrast, are depicted maintaining social distance from non-rabbinic Jews, interacting with them in formal settings: issuing verdicts in court cases, answering halakhic questions, delivering lectures in public, and the like.² Babylonian rabbis are wary even of casual relationships with non-rabbis, which they fear could lead to more intimate relationships and eventually to marriage, and tarnish their highly prized purity of lineage.³

It is very likely that Babylonian rabbis could afford to be less dependent upon non-rabbis because of their stronger position in society. They had less need than Palestinian rabbis, who were socially weaker, to cultivate relationships with non-rabbis and appeal to wealthy aristocrats for economic support.

As noted in the introductory chapter, my claim is not that the Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic communities are diametrically opposed. Palestinian rabbinic literature often depicts a rabbinic movement closely involved and anxious to cultivate closer ties with non-rabbis, but occasionally it depicts a Palestinian rabbinic desire for detachment from non-rabbis. Babylonian rabbinic sources, in contrast, tend consistently to depict a rabbinic movement aloof from the rest of society in all but the most formal contexts. This portrayal of Babylonian rabbis most likely has a firm basis in reality, although Babylonian storytellers probably idealize reality and underestimate the extent to which Babylonian rabbis were forced to interact with non-rabbis as an inevitable part of everyday life, and to depend upon non-rabbis for support and social advancement.

These distinctions between Babylonian and Palestinian Jewry are probably explicable in terms of differences between Persian and Roman culture. Persian society was more highly stratified than contemporary Roman society and boundaries between the classes were more rigid in Persia than in Rome. So Babylonian sages were very likely influenced by the prevailing social conditions in Persia to keep their distance from non-rabbinic Jews to a greater extent than did their Palestinian counterparts.⁴

In this discussion, the term “Palestinian sources” refers to statements attributed to, as well as stories involving, Palestinian rabbis, preserved in the various rabbinic compilations of late antiquity: the *Bavli*, *Yerushalmi*, and midrashic collections. The term “Babylonian sources” refers to statements by, and stories involving, Babylonian sages found in the same rabbinic compilations. Some statements attributed to Babylonian rabbis in Palestinian compilations reflect Palestinian norms and practices, and some statements attributed to Palestinian rabbis in Babylonian compilations are more Babylonian than Palestinian. These are exceptional cases, however, and do not affect our basic thesis that a clear-cut distinction exists between Palestine and Babylonia. The small number of exceptions test but do not refute the rule.⁵

The term “informal” refers to encounters between rabbis and non-rabbis described by the sources as serendipitous, with rabbis occupying a number of unofficial roles: casual acquaintance, guest on a journey, friendly neighbor, and the like. The term “formal” describes encounters in which (1) the rabbi occupies one of several official roles: judge, teacher, employer, and public homileticist, or (2) the relationship between rabbi and non-rabbi is determined by custom, correctness, and convention.

NON-RABBINIC SUPPORT OF RABBIS

With rare exceptions (see below) only Palestinian sources encourage non-rabbis to provide sages with food, clothing, and shelter. Typically, these sources describe the great rewards which result from such generosity, both in this world and the next.⁶ On b. Ketubot 111b, for example, R.Elazar asserts that ignorant non-rabbis [*amei ha-arez*] “do not live,” probably meaning they have no share in the world to come. R.Yohanan objects, “It is not pleasing to their master [God] that you say this,” but Elazar proves his point from scripture. Seeing that Yohanan is saddened by the fate of the *amei ha-arez*, Elazar says, “I found a remedy for them from the Torah,” according to which they can “cleave to the Divine Presence” by marrying their daughters to sages, helping sages do business, and benefiting them monetarily.

This and the similar stories discussed below are told by rabbis in part to convince non-rabbis to support sages generously. The need to tell such stories suggests that some people were not as generous as the rabbis would have liked and they therefore had to be urged to give more.⁷ The fact that Palestinian rabbis turned to wealthy non-rabbis for support is significant, and indicates that they sought to strengthen ties with them. The story described above is the first of numerous indications that Palestinian rabbis are concerned with non-rabbis and how they impinge upon the world of the rabbis.⁸

In addition, the combination of these and numerous other stories which portray close contact between Palestinian sages and non-sages, even when the close contact is not part of the story’s main point, makes it difficult to dismiss these portrayals as rabbinic wishful thinking or propoganda. Very likely, these stories reflect a reality of Palestinian life which the rabbis encouraged and exaggerated but did not totally invent. Similarly, recurring portrayals of rabbis appealing to non-rabbis for financial support and social advancement in numerous unrelated sources, including situations where the portrayal yields no homiletical message, are difficult to dismiss as fictional creations of storytellers or editors. Such stories, as noted above, are largely absent from Babylonian sources.

Vayikra Rabbah 5:4 records a series of stories in which wealthy non-rabbis support rabbis.⁹ In the first story, Abba Yudan is described as a man who gives generously but has fallen on hard times. When he sees R.Eliezer, R.Yehoshua, and R.Akiba coming to collect charity for their fellow rabbis, he is crestfallen because he has little left to give them. His wife advises him to sell half of his one remaining field and give them the money. He does so and is rewarded by God when he discovers treasure on his property. The rabbis place his name at the top of their list of donors and give him a seat of honor at their side.

In another story found in the same section of Vayikra Rabbah, R.Hiyya bar Abba collects money on behalf of rabbis in the study house in Tiberius.

A “member of the house of Saloni” offers to give a certain measure of gold, and Hiyya bar Abba honors the man by seating him at his side. A similar story involving Resh Lakish follows, according to which the community gives money in support of the rabbis and a certain wealthy individual in Bostra gives a “matching gift.”¹⁰

Elsewhere, in a motif found frequently in Palestinian sources, brothers who are not sages receive praise for supporting the Torah-study of their siblings. In several contexts, for example, Palestinian midrashim praise the biblical figure, Zevulun, for supporting his scholarly brother, Yissakhar.¹¹ A statement attributed to R. Abba bar Kahana on b. Sanhedrin 49a favorably describes the same relationship between a scholar, King David, and a non-scholar, Joab. Joab’s effectiveness as a general is due to David’s righteous judgment of the nation, and David is free to apply himself to righteous judgment because Joab takes care of military matters. The scholar and the non-scholar are an effective team rather than competitors or antagonists.

In addition, on b. Sanhedrin 92a R. Elazar is recorded as saying, “Whoever does not benefit sages economically will never see the hint of a blessing.” Along these same lines, y. Sotah 7:4 (2 1d) states that “people who do *mizvot*” will be shaded in the shade of Torah scholars in the next world as a reward for their support of scholars.¹² On b. Berakhot 10b, R. Eliezer ben Yaakov states that whenever someone houses a scholar or gives him money, scripture counts it to him as if he offered a sacrifice which atones for the entire community. In separate statements on b. Berakhot 63b, R. Yosi, R. Nehemiah, and R. Eliezer son of R. Yosi Hagelili praise one who houses, feeds, and gives money to scholars. According to b. Pesahim 53b, R. Yohanan states, “Whoever puts merchandise into the pockets of sages (enabling them to earn a living) will merit a seat in the heavenly court.” According to Vayikra Rabbah 25:1–2, R. Yirmiya says in the name of R. Hiyya: “[If a person] has not learned [Torah], and has neither performed, observed, nor taught it to others, but, [although] he was not able to maintain [scholars], maintained [them]...behold, he is included in the term ‘blessed.’” Avot de-R. Natan, Version B, chapter 11 likewise tries to motivate people to open their houses to sages, promising that one’s house will be blessed by a sage’s merit if one provides hospitality.¹³

It would be a simple matter to provide additional examples of these motifs in Palestinian sources.¹⁴ They are almost totally lacking, however, in Babylonian sources prior to the fourth Amoraic generation. One rare exception is found on b. Hullin 133a, which quotes Rav Yosef as saying, “A priest who has a rabbi living in his neighborhood who is struggling to make ends meet should give him the priestly portions [of an animal, which the priest is entitled to] even if they have not yet come into his hand.” A story follows in which Rava attempts to carry out Yosef’s opinion in practice. Perhaps the man’s priestly status, however, helps to explain this exceptional case. Priests may have been considered by some Babylonian rabbis to be of

sufficiently high status and purity of lineage to warrant an exception to their usual practice of avoiding direct contact with non-rabbis.

However, it must be remembered that my claim throughout this book is not that Babylonian and Palestinian practices and opinions have nothing in common but rather that in the area of concern the two rabbinic centers have distinctly different tendencies and follow easily distinguishable patterns. One exception does not invalidate my thesis, but simply cautions us not to exaggerate the real dichotomy between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis.

It is significant, furthermore, that the story involves Rava. This story, therefore, is an example of a phenomenon we will encounter throughout this book, namely that, beginning in the fourth generation, Babylonian Amoraim become increasingly susceptible to Palestinian influence.¹⁵

It is uncertain whether later Babylonian attitudes and practices changed as the result of contact with Palestinian models, or whether later Babylonian storytellers dwelled more on the theme of rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis as a result of their contact with Palestinian models. Do the later Babylonian stories attest to a shift in Babylonian rabbinic behavior, or to a decrease in the tendency of Babylonian rabbinic storytellers to idealize reality by portraying Babylonian rabbis as more self-sufficient and aloof from non-rabbis than they really were? In other words, perhaps the later Babylonian storytellers bear witness to a reality which existed earlier, but which earlier Babylonian storytellers deemphasized prior to their exposure to Palestinian models.

Another story involving fourth-generation Babylonian rabbis, found on b. Taanit 21b–22a, likewise idealizes and promotes non-rabbinic support of sages. According to this story, Abba the bloodletter is a pious non-rabbi who receives greetings from heaven daily while Abaye receives them once a week and Rava once a year. Abaye sends students to test Abba and determine what he does to deserve heavenly favor. Among Abba's good deeds, they discover, is his hospitality to rabbis, since he feeds the visiting students and houses them overnight. Like the Palestinian traditions surveyed above, this story implies that God rewards people who support sages.¹⁶

As noted above, Palestinian rabbis sometimes encourage non-rabbis to marry their daughters to sages. Such marriages facilitate non-rabbinic support of rabbis and solidify the rabbis' social status through marriage to wealthy aristocrats. On b. Sanhedrin 99a, for example, R. Yohanan states that all of the prophetic promises of future rewards were intended for "those who marry their daughters to sages, those who help sages in business, and those who benefit sages by giving them of their own property."¹⁷ In addition, a story on b. Nedarim 51a describes Ben Elasha, Rabbi's father-in-law and apparently a non-rabbi,¹⁸ as "extremely wealthy." A story on b. Ketubot 62b–63a involving R. Akiba, Ben Kalba Savua, and Akiba's wife glorifies marriage between sages and non-sages and favorably depicts a wealthy father-in-law happily agreeing to support his scholarly son-in-law. T. Avodah Zarah 3:9–

10 approves of marriage between *haverim* and *amei ha-arez* if it is stipulated that the wife will observe rabbinic laws of purity. Rav, in contrast, a Babylonian Amora, warns on b. Kiddushin 70a that “all who marry a woman for the sake of money will have unworthy children.”

Several traditions preserved on b. Eruvin 85b–86a attest to the deference which Palestinian rabbis paid to the wealthy, most likely to cultivate their monetary support. When Bonius ben Bonius came before Rabbi, he would announce,

“Make room for the one who possesses one hundred maneh.” When another man came he would say, “Make way for the one who possesses two hundred maneh.” R. Yishmael son of R. Yosi says to him, “Rabbi, [Bonius’s] father has one thousand ships in the sea and one thousand cities on land.” [Rabbi] said to [Yishmael], “When you reach his father, say to him, ‘Don’t send [your son] before me in such clothes,’”

but rather in clothes which reveal his true wealth. The Talmud goes on to inform us that “Rabbi honored the wealthy” and “R. Akiba honored the wealthy,” as Rava bar Mari¹⁹ expounded, “‘One in this world will dwell in God’s presence when manna preserves true love’ (Psalms 61:8).²⁰ When will the one [who God has favored] in this world dwell in God’s presence? When manna [i.e., one who possesses wealth] performs good deeds.” Examples could easily be multiplied.²¹

Here as well, a statement attributed to a later Babylonian Amora conforms to Palestinian models. On b. Shabbat 23b, Rava claims that one who respects rabbis will have sons-in-law who are rabbis. It is unlikely that Rava has to urge rabbis to “respect rabbis,” and his comment is most likely addressed to non-rabbis and expresses approval of marriage between rabbis and non-rabbis.²²

As noted above, Palestinian sources are not unanimous in promoting the practice of non-rabbinic support of rabbis. A few dissenting voices are preserved as well. On b. Sanhedrin 52a–b, for example, R. Elazar says that at first a sage seems like gold to a non-rabbi.²³ When the sage speaks to him, he seems like silver. When he benefits the sage, he seems like clay. The sage demeans himself in the eyes of the non-rabbi, in other words, when he stoops to accept material support. Other examples could be supplied.²⁴ The sources preserve a Palestinian debate, therefore, which Babylonian sages avoid almost entirely.

Palestinian polemics against the practice of sages benefiting from non-rabbis further support our claim that the practice took place. The practice of sages “demeaning themselves” by accepting support from non-rabbis was perceived by some Palestinian rabbis as a social problem, important enough to inspire polemic, while other rabbis engaged in the practice, saw nothing wrong with it, and even spoke about its positive impact on society.

Why are Palestinian sources preoccupied with this issue but Babylonian sources tend not to be? As noted above, Babylonian rabbis, more so than Palestinians, keep their distance from the non-rabbinic population. They therefore tend not to tell stories or state opinions encouraging non-rabbis to support or marry their daughters to rabbis since such practices would lead to the breakdown of social barriers between rabbis and non-rabbis, which Babylonian rabbis took great pains to construct and maintain.²⁵ Babylonian rabbis tend not to express the desire for more intimate contact with non-rabbinic Jews; Palestinian rabbis do so routinely.

Another contributing factor may have been the greater financial need of Palestinian rabbis, in keeping with the claim of several scholars that economic conditions in Babylonia were superior to those in Palestine.²⁶ The arguments advanced by these scholars, unfortunately, are not fully convincing and the question warrants further study.²⁷

A more likely variation of this thesis is that Palestinian rabbis lacked a strong institutional basis for their authority and the above statements reflect part of their effort to acquire such a basis. They appeal to non-rabbinic Jews for support in an attempt to gain a stronger foothold in and eventual control over Palestinian Jewish society. Babylonian rabbis, according to this theory, were more powerful than their Palestinian counterparts and already occupied a strong position in society. They tended to be secure enough to wait for others to come to them for judgment and legal decision-making and felt relatively little compulsion to humble themselves by seeking monetary support from the wealthy and marriage ties with the powerful.

Modern scholars debate the question of the intended audience of Talmudic statements. Is Talmudic literature aimed at an elite audience of sages alone, or does it also have a popular audience in mind? The statements discussed above are unsubtle attempts to convince non-rabbis to be generous toward rabbis, and most likely have a popular audience in mind.²⁸

It does not follow, however, that the larger discourses which contain these statements are also aimed at a popular audience. Comments originally intended for one audience might be incorporated into larger discourses directed to a different audience. Final resolution of this question must await detailed analysis of the larger discourses in their entirety.

It should also be emphasized that it is highly unlikely that non-rabbis studied the Talmuds in search of the few statements addressed specifically to them. Rather, these statements originated in a public forum in which Palestinian rabbis addressed their comments to non-rabbinic Jews. An important feature of the content of these statements was not lost when the statements were incorporated into the Talmud.

PALESTINIAN INFORMALITY VERSUS BABYLONIAN FORMALITY

As we have seen, rabbinic sources of late antiquity yield evidence of close involvement between rabbis and non-rabbis in Palestine, and of social barriers between sages and non-sages in Babylonia. Palestinian sources tend to depict informal interactions between rabbis and non-rabbis, but Babylonian sources do not. Babylonian rabbis are portrayed interacting with non-rabbis primarily in the context of slave—master, employer—employee, or owner—customer relationships, or in the context of formal encounters in which rabbis act as teachers, judges, or halakhic decision-makers. Palestinian sources, in contrast, often depict chance encounters on the road, in the bath house, over dinner, and the like.²⁹

In addition, contact between rabbis and non-rabbis in Palestinian sources, no matter what the context, tends to be more informal than that in Babylonian sources.³⁰ Palestinian rabbis are portrayed as less distant and more emotionally involved with non-rabbis than are their Babylonian counterparts, and Palestinian stories tend to depict the breakdown of physical barriers between them.

The situation in Babylon

A story on b. Shabbat 55a, which describes a woman approaching Shmuel with a judicial complaint, illustrates the Babylonian tendency carried to an extreme. Shmuel ignores her, in response to which Rav Yehuda cites scripture's disapproval of those who ignore the "cries of the poor." Shmuel answers that he bears no responsibility for the woman, since Mar Ukba, the exilarch, presides over the judiciary. The Babylonian rabbi is free to turn his back on the plight of a poor woman, claims the story, so Shmuel leaves it to the exilarch to handle her case.³¹

This story is difficult to reconcile with hundreds of others which depict rabbis, including Shmuel himself, acting as judges of non-rabbis. Perhaps the story's point is that sages have the freedom to choose whether or not to judge. If they choose not to, they commit no sin. Whether or not the story presents the norm, however, I have found no parallel in Palestinian sources to its image of a Babylonian sage's detachment from non-rabbis. Along these same lines, a story on b. Sukkah 3 1a relates that a certain woman who came before Rav Nahman said to him,

"The exilarch and all of the rabbis of the house of the exilarch use a stolen sukkah." She screamed but he paid no attention to her. She said to him, "A woman whose father has 318 slaves screams before you and you pay no attention to her?" Rav Nahman said to them, "This one is a bleater. She is entitled to nothing but the value of the wood."

The number 318, incidentally, is probably a reference to the number of slaves Abraham owned according to rabbinic interpretation of the Bible.³² The woman claims that as a Jew, that is, a descendant of Abraham, she is entitled to a hearing. Nahman ignores her, unimpressed by her pedigree.

B.Taanit 20b describes Rav Huna as a regal figure who “every cloudy day would be carried out in a golden sedan-chair to survey the entire city,” seeing to it that unstable walls are torn down and rebuilt. Here the rabbi is portrayed as socially responsible, but his labor on behalf of society involves no contact with individuals. If anything, the trappings of royalty which surround him distance him from all but his personal retinue.

It should be emphasized that my claim is that Babylonian rabbis tend to keep non-rabbis at arm’s length, generally by relating to individuals either in formal ways or in formal contexts. Babylonian rabbis do not cut themselves off from society. On the contrary, they are very often depicted as society’s leaders. Rather, they turn their backs on the individual non-rabbis who comprise society, generally relating to them either not at all or only in the most tightly controlled and formalized fashion.

According to b. Taanit 24b, Rav Yehuda sees two people throwing a piece of bread back and forth and says to himself, “There must be enough food in the world.” He concentrates, and suddenly “there is hunger in the world.” The rabbis convince Yehuda’s attendant, Rav Kahana son of R.Hananiah, to “compel him” to travel to the marketplace, where he sees a large group of people clamoring for dates.³³ Yehuda says, “There must be hunger in the world,” so he tells his attendant to remove one of his shoes, whereupon rain immediately falls. According to this strange story, Yehuda is unaware of what transpires around him until his attendant “forces” him out into the real world.³⁴ He contributes to society, but only at a distant remove.

According to b. Sanhedrin 99b, Rav Yosef defines an *apikoros* as one who says, “What good have the rabbis done for us? They read scripture to themselves; they recite Tannaitic traditions to themselves.” Rav Yosef, speaking on behalf of non-rabbis, describes the rabbis as a closed circle of sages who make no effort to reach out to or educate those who are not already members of their club.³⁵ Yosef pejoratively labels one who makes this accusation an *apikoros*, but he attests to the charge having been made and takes it seriously enough to protest against it.

Along these same lines, Babylonian rabbis persistently try to free themselves from the obligation to pay the poll-tax imposed on the Jews by the Persian government, in part to distinguish themselves from the lower elements of Persian society, including the rest of Jewish society. As Geo Widengren writes,

There is...another important source..., Nihayat al-Irab, which states what categories were subject to the poll-tax, namely 1. two classes of categories among the population engaged in the

cultivation of the soil: muzara'un and 'akarah 2. the totality of all Christians and Jews.... The poll-tax hit especially the lower classes of farmers and workers among the rural population, and the religious minorities in the Sassanian empire were put on a level with them, at least from the days of Xosrau Anošurvan.³⁶

Finally, Christine Hayes concludes that the Bavli forbids social interactions between Jews and idolaters more strictly than does the Yerushalmi. Hayes argues convincingly that the Bavli's greater strictness derives from the awareness of Babylonian rabbis of their status as a tiny minority among a sea of idolaters, in danger of being swallowed up if they fail to erect imposing boundaries between themselves and the outside world.³⁷ Hayes's conclusions lend weight to my claim that Babylonian sources depict rabbinic isolation from non-rabbis in contrast to Palestinian portrayals of closer relationships between them. They also support my claim that the isolation of Babylonian rabbis was fueled in part by acute anxiety about their genealogical purity, which contrasted sharply with the more relaxed Palestinian attitude.

The situation in Palestine

The following examples, many more of which are cited in the notes, depict informal contact between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis:

Informal contact

B.Nedarim 9b records a Tannaitic statement which purports to relate Shimon Hazaddik's conversation with a nazirite.³⁸ Shimon reports,

A man came from the south and I asked him, "My son, why did you ruin your beautiful hair [by taking upon yourself the nazirite vow, prohibiting yourself a haircut]?" [The nazirite answers] "I was a shepherd for my father in my city. I went to get water from a spring and saw my reflection. My passion rushed over me and wished to destroy me. I said to it, 'Wicked one, why are you so proud in a world that isn't yours?'" [Immediately, Shimon relates, he arose and kissed the nazirite on the head, saying] "My son, may nazirites like you increase in Israel."

In this source, Shimon tenderly addresses the nazirite as "my son" and kisses him on the head as an expression of approval. Encounters between Babylonian rabbis and non-rabbis do not depict such intimacy. They typically begin with the formula "So-and-so came before Rav So-and-so," following

which the non-rabbi asks the rabbi a question or requests a judicial decision. The case of the nazirite, in contrast, contains no formal approach by the non-rabbi before the rabbi, and apparently describes a chance encounter.³⁹

Another chance encounter is described in a Tannaitic tradition on b. Taanit 20a–b.⁴⁰ R. Elazar son of R. Shimon rides a donkey by the edge of a river. Preoccupied with pleasant thoughts about his great knowledge of Torah, Elazar encounters a very ugly man. The man greets him, and Elazar responds, “Idiot; How ugly you are! Are all the people of your city as ugly as you?” The man answers that Elazar should “go to the one who made me [i.e., God] and complain.” A lengthy conversation ensues, with Elazar receiving his just deserts and begging the man’s forgiveness. The informal nature of the context and content of the discussion need no elaboration, and the meeting between rabbi and non-rabbi is clearly described as spontaneous.⁴¹

In addition, b. Baba Mezia 30b relates the story of R. Yishmael son of R. Yosi walking along the road. He comes upon a man who had been carrying a pile of wood but has put it down to rest. Yishmael does not wish to perform the difficult and undignified labor of lifting the wood, yet he knows that he is commanded to do so. When the man tells him to “pick it up for me,” therefore, Yishmael asks him, “How much is it worth?,” since he would rather buy the wood than help the man lift it. The man answers, “Half a zuz,” so Yishmael gives him half a zuz to acquire the wood and free himself from the obligation to help lift it. He next renounces ownership so that his property will not remain in the public domain where it might cause damage for which Yishmael would be liable. The man proceeds to acquire it again and Yishmael again gives him half a zuz and renounces ownership. He sees that the man is about to acquire it again so he tells him, “I renounce ownership concerning everyone in the world but you.”

Several Palestinian sources mention houses or rooms belonging to non-rabbis serving as the site of rabbinic gatherings.⁴² T. Shabbat 2:5 and b. Shabbat 29b, for example, mention the upper room of Nitze’s house in Lydda; t. Eruvin 6:2 mentions the courtyard of the house of Geludah in Lydda; t. Pesahim 10:12 the house of Boethus ben Zonen in Lydda; t. Sotah 13:3 the upper room of the house of Guriah in Jericho; and y. Hagigah 1:7 (76c) the upper room of the house of Aris.⁴³ In a similar vein, Vayikra Rabbah 34:13 urges rabbis to seek out the company of non-rabbis and spread rabbinic teachings: “[It is to share your bread with the hungry] and to take the wretched poor into your home’ (Isaiah 58:7), these are sages who enter the houses of *amei ha-arez* and fill them with words of Torah.”⁴⁴ Babylonian rabbis instruct non-rabbis in the context of formal institutions such as the *pirka* (see below). In Palestine, in contrast, the instruction purportedly takes place in the home of the *am ha-arez*.

Several other Palestinian sources depict casual encounters between rabbis and non-rabbis. B. Shabbat 30b–31a records the well known story of a non-rabbi who repeatedly bothers Hillel at home, interrupting his Sabbath

preparations to ask him several ridiculous questions. Hillel is trying to wash his hair, but he wraps his head in a towel and opens his door each time the man wishes to speak with him. In addition, on b. Eruvin 53b R. Yehoshua ben Hananiah tells of a young girl who scolded him for trespassing, and of a boy who gave him directions into the city.

My point is not that Palestinian sources transmit trivialities. Yehoshua's stories, like all Talmudic tales, have a rabbinically sanctioned point and teach rabbinic values, theology, or halakhah (the boy, for example, impresses Yehoshua with his wisdom). In the course of doing so, however, they depict rabbinic interactions with non-rabbis in a manner unparalleled in Babylonian sources (but see below).

According to a story in y. Peah 7:4 (20a), R. Abahu, R. Yosi bar Haninah, and R. Shimon ben Lakish walk past a vineyard and the tenant of the vineyard brings them large peaches. A few days later they pass the same vineyard and become very angry when the tenant offers them smaller peaches. According to Eikhah Rabbah 3:17, Yosi Reisha offers hospitality to R. Abahu in Bostra. He serves him eighty varieties of a delicacy and apologizes for not being able to offer him more.⁴⁵

Similar stories are preserved in other Palestinian sources. In y. Shevi'it 4:3 (35a), for example, R. Hinena bar Papa and R. Shmuel bar Nahman pass by a Jew who plows during the Sabbatical year and thereby violates a biblical command. Shmuel bar Nahman greets the man and encourages him in his work, prompting a debate about whether or not Shmuel's greeting implies approval of the man's violation of the Sabbatical year.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, y. Baba Mezia 2:11 (8d) describes R. Yohanan journeying from Tiberias to Sepphoris and "seeing a man" traveling in the opposite direction. Yohanan asks, "What's happening in the city?" and the man answers that "a rabbi died and everyone is running to attend to him."⁴⁷ In y. Terumot 2:3 (41c) R. Hama bar Haninah relates that "Father and I went up to the springs of Geder and they served us eggs as small as crab apples and their flavor was as good as that of apricots."⁴⁸

Along these same lines, a story on b. Baba Mezia 22a relates that Amemar, Mar Zutra, and Rav Ashi, sixth-generation Babylonian rabbis, visited the orchard of Mari bar Isak. Mari's sharecropper serves them fruit, and Mari arrives later and announces that the sharecropper should have served them better fruit. Once again we see that toward the end of the Amoraic period Babylonian rabbinic interactions with non-rabbis (or the practices of later Babylonian storytellers) begin to change in accordance with Palestinian models.

Informal address

In addition, only in Palestinian sources do rabbis address non-rabbis as "my son," or "my daughter," reflecting an intimate, albeit paternalistic,

relationship between them.⁴⁹ According to a Tannaitic tradition on b. Ketubot 66b, R. Yohanan ben Zakkai leaves Jerusalem riding on a donkey while his students walk behind him. He sees a naked woman gathering barley from animal excrement, and seeing him approach she wraps herself in her hair and stands before him. "Rabbi, feed me," she says piteously, and he answers, "My daughter, who are you?" "I am the daughter of Nakdimon ben Guryon," she answers, and Yohanan asks, "My daughter, what happened to your father's wealth...what happened to your father-in-law's wealth?" The story is important for my purposes because it portrays serendipitous contact between a rabbi and a non-rabbi and cites Yohanan addressing the woman as "my daughter."⁵⁰

Along these same lines, b. Nedarim 20b records two judicial cases, one judged by R. Yehuda Hanasi, a Palestinian, the other by Rav, a Babylonian.⁵¹ In both cases, a woman approaches a rabbi with a complaint against her husband: "Rabbi, I set a table for him and he overturned it," i.e., he performed some sort of objectionable sexual practice. The differing responses by the two rabbis are instructive. Rabbi says, "My daughter, the Torah permitted you to him. What can I do for you?" Rabbi, the Palestinian, refers to the woman in the second person and gently addresses her as "my daughter."⁵² By contrast, Rav, the Babylonian, says, "How is it different from a fish?"⁵³

Social contact

Furthermore, several sources depict Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis dining and partying together. A story on b. Shabbat 119a and paralleled on Bereshit Rabbah 11:4, for example, describes R. Hiyya bar Abba lodging with a fabulously wealthy man in Laodicea.⁵⁴ Hiyya asks his host what meritorious deeds he performed to deserve such wealth and the man answers, "I was a butcher and every time I came upon a nice animal I said, 'This is for Shabbat.'"

Elsewhere, a story on y. Demai 7:1 (26a) relates that Rabbi and R. Yosi son of R. Yehuda were guests at the house of a certain householder (*ba'al habayit*). Their host is wrongly suspected of failure to give tithes. In addition, b. Gittin 57b–58a describes a party attended by unnamed rabbis, and non-rabbis named Kamza and Bar Kamza. A story on b. Hullin 87a depicts a *Min* (heretic) arriving at Rabbi's door with good news.⁵⁵ Rabbi invites the *Min* to dinner and offers him the honor of drinking the cup of blessing, which implies that the *Min* is a Jew.⁵⁶ The informal contact described in these sources is without parallel in stories about Babylonians before the fourth generation.⁵⁷

According to b. Berakhot 64a R. Abin Halevi claims, "Anyone who partakes of a meal attended by a sage, it is as if he partakes of the glory of the Divine Presence." Abin Halevi looks favorably upon rabbis and non-rabbis dining together, apparently so non-rabbis will observe how to behave

and will gain wisdom from the words of the rabbi, but very likely also because of the social benefits which will accrue to the rabbi who is sought as a dinner guest. A Tannaitic statement on b. Hullin 106a imagines a scenario in which a “scribe” and an ignoramus are eating together. The scribe and the ignoramus should remain together, the statement rules, so that the scribe can bless properly and enable the ignoramus to fulfill his obligation.

According to Vayikra Rabbah 9:3, R. Yannai encounters a wealthy man and invites him to his home for dinner. Yannai offends his guest by calling him a “dog” when he turns out to be unversed in Bible and Mishnah and unable to say the blessing after the meal.⁵⁸ Yannai learns a lesson about the folly of excessive haughtiness when the man accuses him of hoarding his “inheritance,” since the Torah is “an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4) and not of “the congregation of Yannai.”

The story depicts a sage and a wealthy non-rabbi dining together, and argues against Yannai’s supercilious behavior before his final comeuppance. The story implies that informal contact between some rabbis and non-rabbis was fraught with tension because of rabbinic haughtiness, a situation which the author(s) of this story find unacceptable. However, this story’s portrayal of Yannai is not surprising given the description above of the ambivalent or hostile attitude of some Palestinian rabbis toward non-rabbis.

Other Palestinian sources surveyed above (see also below) paint a more idyllic picture of informal contacts between rabbis and non-rabbis, or, more importantly, imply that such contact was routine by mentioning it *en passant* in descriptive details which have no bearing on the main point of the story. Prior to the fourth Amoraic generation, in contrast, Babylonian sources portray little informal contact between rabbis and non-rabbis and do not record attempts to criticize the situation or to improve relations between the two groups.

Emotion

Palestinian sources also depict rabbis expressing emotion in the presence of non-rabbis, and depict emotional attachments between them absent from Babylonian sources. M. Nedarim 9:10, for example, tells the story of a man who vows not to benefit from his niece. The niece is brought before R. Yishmael, who “beautifies” her. Yishmael asks the man, “My son, you vowed concerning her?”, and declares the vow null. Yishmael bursts into tears and exclaims, “Jewish women are beautiful, but poverty makes them unattractive.”

Yishmael, therefore, gently addresses the man as “my son” and cries in response to the sad fate of Jewish women. Jewish women return the favor, concludes the story, and mourn for him when he dies.

Along these same lines, b. Sanhedrin 104b relates the story of a woman who loses her son and “weeps about him at night.” Rabban Gamliel hears

her “and weeps along with her until his eyelashes fall out. The next day,” the story continues, “his students recognized her and removed her from his neighborhood.” Gamliel’s empathy with the unfortunate woman is so great that his students take action to spare their master further grief.

Similarly, y. Sanhedrin 6:3 (23b) tells the story of a man taken out to be executed. He maintains his innocence in an impassioned and convincing manner. His words reach the sages, who cry because rabbinic law renders them powerless to save his life. The emotional attachment between rabbi and non-rabbi described by these and other stories is without parallel in Babylonian sources.⁵⁹ Put simply, contemplation of the sad fate of non-rabbis does not bring tears to the eyes of Babylonian rabbis.

According to two Tannaitic sources on b. Yevamot 122b, R. Tarfon exults when Yohanan ben Yonatan Aryei of Kefar Shihaya frees a woman to remarry by testifying to her husband’s death. “Well done, Aryei,” Tarfon exclaims, expressing happiness toward a non-rabbi to a degree unparalleled in Babylonian sources.

Only in Palestinian sources do we find the motif of a rabbi saving or extending the lives of non-rabbis, who gratefully name their children or are themselves named after the rabbi. According to b. Yevamot 105a, members of a family have a history of dying young. They come before R. Yohanan, who advises them to “go, study Torah, and live.” They do so and are referred to as “the family of Yohanan” as a result. According to a similar story about R. Natan, three of a woman’s babies die after circumcision. The mother brings a fourth baby before Natan, who examines the child and rules that he is not ready to be circumcized. The mother waits and the baby survives his circumcision, prompting the mother to name him Natan in honor of the rabbi who saved his life. My point is not that these stories are literally true, but that they presuppose a relationship between rabbis and non-rabbis without parallel in Babylonian sources.

Physical boundaries

Palestinian and Babylonian sources also differ in that prior to the fourth Amoraic generation only Palestinian sources depict the breakdown of physical boundaries between rabbis and non-rabbis. B. Sanhedrin 67b, for example, tells the story of a woman who gathers dirt from under the feet of R. Hanina, apparently because she believes the dirt possesses magical or medicinal powers. The only comparable story involving Babylonians describes people collecting dirt from the grave of Rav. In Palestine, people approach the rabbi during his lifetime. In Babylonia, they wait until after his death.⁶⁰

In addition, y. Sotah 1:4 (16d) tells of a man who becomes angry when his wife comes home late from synagogue, having stayed to hear R. Meir’s lecture. The husband forbids his wife to enter the house until she spits in

Meir's eye, and Meir encourages her to spit in his eye not once but seven times, which enables her to return to her husband. Meir's students object that his actions dishonor the Torah and he answers that if God allows His name to be dissolved for the sake of marital harmony (in the ordeal of the suspected adulteress), then certainly Meir should allow himself to be mistreated for the same purpose.⁶¹

Along these same lines, a story on b. Nedarim 66b depicts a man vowing not to benefit his wife until she spits on R. Shimon ben Gamliel, and Shimon allows her to spit on his clothes.⁶²

Y. Kiddushin 1:7 (61c) tells of a man who kisses the feet of R. Yonatan. Yonatan explains that the man came to him with a complaint that his son was refusing to support him. Yonatan advised the man to insult his son publicly, thereby humiliating him into providing support and prompting the father's extravagant display of gratitude.⁶³ We find no stories of Babylonian rabbis tolerating direct contact with non-rabbis, with the exception of one source involving fifth-generation Amoraim.

This Babylonian story involves Rav Papi and depicts a certain Bar Hama cleared of murder charges on the basis of Papi's arguments on his behalf (b. Sanhedrin 27a–b). Bar Hama "arises and kisses him on his feet" as the father had done to R. Yonatan. Once again, relations between a non-rabbi and a later Babylonian Amora conform to Palestinian models, either because Babylonian rabbinic behavior began to change, or because Babylonian rabbinic storytelling changed, becoming more willing to depict contact between rabbis and non-rabbis as a result of exposure to Palestinian conventions.

Statements on b. Nedarim 81a shed light on the Babylonian situation described above. The Talmud asks why sages do not father children who become sages, and Rav Sheshet b. d'Rav Idi answers, "So they [i.e., sages] do not lord it over the community." Mar Zutra says, "Because they lord it over the community," and Rav Ashi says, "Because they call people donkeys." The rabbinic sense of superiority to non-rabbis, therefore, was perceived by rabbis themselves as a problem in Babylonia. Interestingly, the Babylonians cited here are fifth- and sixth-generation Amoraim, perhaps indicating that after Palestinian attitudes began to penetrate Babylonia during the later Amoraic period Babylonian attitudes came to be perceived as particularly problematic.⁶⁴

In addition, the Talmud's initial question here ("Why don't sages father children who become sages?") presupposes a rabbinic movement open to individuals who are not themselves descended from rabbis. After all, if sages do not (or only rarely)⁶⁵ father children who become sages, then obviously the rabbinic movement is being populated in part by the children of non-sages. As we will argue below, this notion is found exclusively in Palestinian sources prior to the fourth Amoraic generation. Babylonian rabbis tend to forbid outsiders entrance into their midst. Once again either (1) Babylonian attitudes and practices begin to change in response to the increasing

importance of Palestinian models during the later Amoraic period, or (2) Babylonian authors and storytellers subtly alter their portrayal of the Babylonian rabbinic movement in response to Palestinian models.

Distribution of charity

In addition, Palestinian⁶⁶ and later Babylonian sources depict non-rabbis directly approaching rabbis with requests for food or money.⁶⁷ In one context a Palestinian rabbi directly distributes charity to the poor.⁶⁸ Similarly, according to b. Ketubot 67b “R. Abba would tie money in a handkerchief, throw it behind his back, and position himself among the poor,” who would take money from his bundle. On b. Baba Batra 9b R. Yizhak says, “One who gives a penny to the poor is blessed with six blessings...and one who consoles him with words is blessed with eleven blessings.”⁶⁹ On y. Peah 8:8 (21b), when R. Yonah “saw a son of good ancestry who had lost his property, he would say to him, ‘My son, because I have heard that you have gained an inheritance from another place, take and you can repay it.’ When he had taken it, he said to him, ‘It is a gift.’” According to another story on the same page in the Yerushalmi, R. Yohanan and R. Shimon ben Lakish meet a poor man on their way to the baths of Tiberias. He asks them for money and they promise to give him some upon their return. By the time they return, the poor man is dead. A story in y. Yevamot 4:12 (6b) relates that a man comes with his twelve wives and thirty-six children to the house of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who supplies them with food. On b. Baba Batra 10a R. Dustai son of R. Yannai states, “One who gives a penny to the poor merits receiving the face of the Divine Presence.” R. Elazar gives a penny to the poor and then prays, fulfilling the verse, “I, through charity, will see Your face” (Psalms 17:15).

We find no comparable cases involving Babylonian Amoraim, with the exception of one case on b. Baba Batra 10a involving post-fourth-generation rabbis. Rav Papa almost dies in an accident and wonders what he did to deserve this brush with death. Hiyya bar Rav from Difti suggests, “Perhaps a poor person came your way and you didn’t provide for him.” While the story claims that Papa did not provide “a penny for the poor,” it nevertheless asserts that a poor person had come his way and he should have given him something, unlike stories involving earlier Babylonians.

Mar Ukba, for example, is an early Babylonian Amora who each day leaves a coin in a door-socket so that the poor man who collects it will not see him. One day the poor man tries to meet the person who is so generous to him, and Ukba runs away and hides in a scorching hot furnace.⁷⁰ This story is conventionally interpreted as an illustration of the lengths to which rabbis will go to avoid embarrassing the poor, but perhaps the desire of Babylonian rabbis to avoid direct encounters with lowly non-rabbis is also at work.

Public locations

A story on b. Baba Mezia 5b involving Babylonian rabbis mentions a dispute between two men regarding ownership of a bath house. One of the men declares the bath house to be sanctified property and “all of the rabbis” stay away from it. This story does not presuppose rabbinic mingling with non-rabbis in a public bath house, however, since public bath houses were unknown in Babylonia.⁷¹ The Persians viewed water as sacred and resented its use for profane purposes such as washing dirt off the body. Very likely, therefore, the story concerns a bath house used by a small group of people, apparently all of them rabbis.⁷²

Significantly, this Babylonian story specifies rabbis while a Palestinian story about a public bath house does not. The Palestinian story, on b. Berakhot 60a, describes R. Abahu entering a bath house, whereupon the floor caves in, “a miracle takes place” and he stands on a pillar and with one arm saves one hundred and one men.

In a related phenomenon, according to b. Sotah 46b, sages who comprise the chief court of a city should accompany a stranger on his journey. Stories involving Babylonian rabbis follow and all of them describe one rabbi accompanying another rabbi rather than a non-rabbi.⁷³

Turning briefly to the study house, it is no surprise to find that in Palestine, this rabbinic institution is occasionally “invaded” by non-rabbis.⁷⁴ According to a Tannaitic statement on b. Berakhot 23a, for example, a prostitute finds a set of tefillin belonging to a rabbinical student, brings them to the study house and claims that they were given to her in exchange for her services. In the well known story of the deposition of Rabban Gamliel on b. Berakhot 28a, a laundryman carries news of R. Yehoshua’s and Rabban Gamliel’s reconciliation to the rabbis gathered in the study house.⁷⁵ Y. Megillah 1:9 (71d) relates a story in which children enter the study house on a rainy day. According to b. Shabbat 104a, unnamed rabbis tell R. Yehoshua ben Levi, “Children came now to the study house and said things the like of which were not said even in the days of Joshua son of Nun.” A story on b. Sotah 22a relates, “A certain woman who had a synagogue in her neighborhood would go every day to pray in R. Yohanan’s study house. He said to her, ‘My daughter, isn’t there a synagogue in your neighborhood?’ She said to him, ‘My master, isn’t there a reward for traveling far [to pray with a man like you]?’” Finally, Vayikra Rabbah 5:4 describes R. Hiyya bar Abba collecting money in support of the rabbis in the study house in Tiberias. A member of the house of Saloni pledges a gift of gold and Hiyya bar Abba honors the man by seating him at his side.⁷⁶

Extreme hatred between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis

Palestinian sources, in addition to depicting close relationships between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis, also show Palestinian rabbinic haughtiness or aloofness from non-rabbis. Babylonian rabbinic sources, in contrast, tend to depict the latter to the near-exclusion of the former. At first glance it may seem problematic, therefore, that several traditions depict great hatred between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis. How can we reconcile these expressions of great hatred with the portrayals of intimate relationships between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis? How can we explain the absence of such expressions of hatred in traditions involving Babylonian rabbis, who maintained stricter boundaries between themselves and non-rabbis?

Perhaps it is precisely because rabbis and *amei ha-arez* had more to do with one another in Palestine that their clashes were at times especially intense. The relative aloofness of Babylonian rabbis meant that their relationships did not generate tremendous passion, either positive or negative. In other words, relationships between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis were not one-dimensional. We find harmony and closeness on the one hand; on the other hand, disharmony and hatred.

Earlier scholars note, however, that the intense expressions of hatred between Palestinian sages and *amei ha-arez* are found only in the Babylonian Talmud. Very likely they are Palestinian traditions reworked by Babylonian tradents or editors in accordance with attitudes in Babylonia.⁷⁷

Among the most noteworthy examples of sources depicting hatred between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis are the following texts: b. Pesahim 49b attributes to R.Elazar the statement that "It is permitted to stab an *am ha-arez* on a Day of Atonement that falls on Shabbat." Elazar's students express surprise: "Rabbi, say 'to slaughter him.'" Elazar explains, "That would require a blessing. The other does not require a blessing." In the same context, R.Yohanan states, "It is permitted to tear an *am ha-arez* like a fish," and R.Akiba claims, "When I was an *am ha-arez* I said, 'Who will give me a sage so I can bite him like a donkey?'" Akiba's students object, "Rabbi, say 'like a dog,'" to which Akiba responds, "A donkey bites and breaks a bone, while a dog bites but does not break a bone." A Tannaitic statement in the same context promises that if a man marries his daughter to an *am ha-arez* the result will be something "ugly and unacceptable," like the product of a union between a grapevine and a bush with sour fruit. Still another Tannaitic statement warns people not to marry the daughter of an *am ha-arez* "because they are reptiles and their wives are vermin, and regarding their daughters scripture says 'Cursed is one who sleeps with a beast.'" R.Elazar states, "Were we not necessary to them for business they would kill us." Finally, a Tannaitic statement asserts, "*Amei ha-arez* hate sages more than idol worshippers hate sages, and their wives [hate sages] more than any of them."⁷⁸

Summary and conclusion

This chapter attempted to show that (1) Palestinian rabbis encourage non-rabbis to provide sages with food, shelter, money, and their marriageable daughters, but Babylonian rabbis tend not to; and (2) Babylonian rabbis are more formal than Palestinians in relating to non-rabbis, less casual, less emotionally involved, and physically more distant.

Very likely, we argued, these findings indicate (1) that Babylonian rabbis occupied a stronger position in society than did Palestinian rabbis, and (2) that Babylonian rabbis wished to maintain social distance from non-rabbis, whom they regarded as threats to their purity of lineage. Babylonian rabbis reasoned that if they became too casual or intimate with non-rabbis, the next step might be marriage which would compromise their highly prized genealogical purity.⁷⁹ We will attempt to show in Chapter Two that the attitude toward lineage was far more relaxed in Palestine. Palestinian rabbis were therefore not frightened by the prospect of marriage to non-rabbis, and in fact they tended to encourage it when it resulted in social or financial rewards.

True, rabbinic society in both Palestine and Babylonia was ideally an aristocracy of learning and, technically speaking, anyone who mastered a certain body of literature and methods of argumentation gained entry into that society. There is no evidence, however, that this actually took place in Babylonia prior to the fourth Amoraic generation. The conclusions of this and the next chapter suggest that entrance into Babylonian rabbinic society was far more difficult than would be suggested by the Talmud's idealized conceptions of a pure meritocracy.⁸⁰

Prior to the fourth Amoraic generation, only in Palestinian sources do we find the motif of the scholar descended from ignoramus, or of rabbis who began their careers as *amei ha-arez* or converts.⁸¹ A Tannaitic statement on b. Sanhedrin 96b, for example, asserts, "Some of the descendants of Sisera studied (or taught) Torah in Jerusalem; some of the descendants of Sennacharib taught Torah in public; some of the descendants of Haman studied (or taught) Torah in Benei Berak."⁸² A story on b. Ketubot 62b–63a describes R. Akiba's transformation from ignorant shepherd to great scholar; another story on b. Ketubot 63a claims that Ben Azzai underwent the same transformation; according to b. Pesahim 49b Akiba describes in picturesque terms his hostility toward sages while he was still an *am ha-arez* (see above). A story on b. Baba Mezia 84a involving R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish depicts Resh Lakish as a brigand whom Yohanan convinces to embark on a path of Torah study, which culminates in his becoming a great rabbi.⁸³ A Tannaitic statement on b. Baba Mezia 58b maintains that "if he was a convert and he comes to learn Torah, don't say to him, 'A mouth that ate carrion, reptiles, and lizards should come to learn Torah which was uttered by the mouth of God?'" A convert has as much right to

learn Torah as a native-born Israelite, and the convert should not be discouraged by being reminded of his unsavory past.

According to b. Baba Mezia 85b, R. Hama son of R. Haninah, a Palestinian Amora,⁸⁴ asserts that Proverbs 14:33 (“Wisdom...makes itself known among dullards”) refers to a sage who is the son of an *am ha-arez*. Ulla, also a Palestinian Amora, clarifies this statement by means of a popular proverb, according to which “A coin in a bottle rattles around.” That is, the sage in a family of ignoramuses resembles something of value in an otherwise empty container. The single coin in the bottle makes noise and draws attention to itself; the bottle full of coins makes no noise like a sage who comes from a family of sages. According to b. Megillah 3a, either R. Yirmiya or R. Hiyya bar Abba (both Palestinian rabbis) asserts that “Unkelos the convert composed⁸⁵ the Aramaic translation of the Torah.”⁸⁶

Once again, a fourth-generation Babylonian Amora conforms to the Palestinian pattern. B. Yevamot 45b relates:

Rava declared Rav Mari bar Rachel fit and appointed him as the charity collector of Babylonia. And even though the master said, “‘You shall surely place a king over yourselves [...one of your brothers you shall place over you as king. You may not appoint a foreign man over you, who is not your brother]’ (Deuteronomy 17:15), all of the appointments which you make shall only be from among your brothers; this one, because his mother is Jewish, we apply to him the verse ‘...one of your brothers.’”

In other words, Mari bar Rachel was the product of a sexual union between a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man, a fact which the Talmud indicates by referring to him as “son of Rachel,” i.e., his mother’s son, suppressing the name of his non-Jewish father. Despite his lowly origin he manages to become a rabbi and apparently one of relatively high standing.⁸⁷

In addition, according to b. Shabbat 23b, Rava says that “whoever loves rabbis will have sons who are rabbis. Whoever esteems rabbis will have sons-in-law who are rabbis.⁸⁸ Whoever fears rabbis, he himself will be a rabbi. If he is incapable [of being a rabbi], then his words will be obeyed as if he were a rabbi.”⁸⁹

The third generation of Babylonian Amoraim witnessed the advent of the *pirka*, an institution which made rabbinic teachings available to large numbers of non-rabbis.⁹⁰ Even the earliest Babylonian Amoraim answer the questions and judge the cases of individual non-rabbis. Before the fourth generation, however, we find no stories involving Babylonian Amoraim which depict converts or people from non-rabbinic families becoming full-fledged members of the rabbinic elite.

We have solid evidence, in other words, that early Babylonian rabbis attempted to spread rabbinic teachings among non-rabbinic Jews. We have

no evidence, however, that Babylonian rabbis prior to the fourth generation attempted to transform non-rabbis into rabbis. Once again it is unclear whether later Babylonian rabbinic behavior changed in response to Palestinian models, or whether later Babylonian storytellers began to change the way they depicted the rabbinic movement.

The rabbinic movement in Palestine was in all likelihood also not a pure meritocracy. But while Gedaliah Alon and others argue persuasively that the position of “rabbi” became hereditary in some circles of Palestinian sages, they admit that other groups of Palestinian sages protested against the phenomenon.⁹¹ Even making allowances for the likelihood that early Babylonian storytellers idealize the rabbinic movement by depicting it as free from outside “contamination,” statements and stories quoted throughout this book indicate that the rabbinic movement in Palestine was more open to penetration from the outside than was the case in Babylonia.

Referring to Babylonian rabbis, Jacob Neusner claims:

The rabbis were eager to bring as many as they could into the academies, and openly to share almost everything they knew. I do not think there is a more vivid contrast between the rabbinical movement as a salvific, or mystery community, and other such movements of the age.... The rabbis were seeking a public hearing, and they wanted nothing more than to be heard and understood everywhere.... Students from all classes were welcome to come to the academies.... Nothing can more clearly illustrate the classless nature of the rabbinical movement.⁹²

Unfortunately, Neusner supplies no proof for his claim.

Comparing the Christian monastery to the Jewish academy, Neusner writes:

So the most striking contrast between the monastery and academy lies in the deeply sectarian quality of the former, by comparison to the broad, public concern of the latter. The academy sent its rabbi back to live in “the world,” to teach, judge, and bear witness in the streets and marketplaces to the doctrines of the school. The monastery sought no such continuing place in the common life.... The academy did not retain its disciples, but always intended for them to go back to the community, which it never supplanted in their lives.... The traditions it sought to preserve were scattered abroad, and supposed to be more permanent by their constant impact upon the shape and form of ordinary life.⁹³

Neusner continues:

More striking still is the contrast between [the rabbis'] social policy and that of the Manichaeans.... Even more "monkish" than the Christians, the Manichaeans divided adherents into two groups, each subjected to its own discipline. On the one hand were the elect, on the other, the hearers.... The two observed entirely different ways of life.... So the Manichaean "hearers" lived a normal, ordinary life, and the elect did not.... Given the hierarchical organization of Sasanian society one can hardly be surprised to find an equivalently stratified structure in the minority communities.⁹⁴

Neusner believes that the rabbis and Jewish society were exceptional in this regard. According to the present study, however, Babylonian Jewish society bore a striking resemblance to Persian, Christian, and even Manichaean society with its hierarchical distinction between rabbi and non-rabbi.

The importance of supporting sages: early Babylonian Amoraic or late editorial?

The attribution date of some statements can be questioned. A discussion on b. Sanhedrin 102b appears at first glance to attribute to Rav Nahman, a second- or third-generation Babylonian Amora, the idea that it is important for non-rabbis to support sages. Nahman asserts that Ahab, the biblical king, had an equal balance of sins and good deeds, and Rav Yosef objects that explicit biblical and Tannaitic accounts depict Ahab as extremely wicked. The discussion concludes with a resolution of Yosef's objection, according to which half of Ahab's sins were expunged because he supported scholars.

(It should be abundantly clear that the attribution of the "Palestinian" view to an occasional pre-fourth-generation Babylonian is not a serious objection to our thesis. Once again, the claim is not that Babylonia and Palestine are diametrically opposed, with no possible points of contact between them, but rather that the two communities are characterized by opposing *tendencies*.)

Furthermore, it was probably later anonymous editors, rather than Rav Nahman, who resolved Yosef's objection, and so even this case is not evidence regarding pre-fourth-generation Amoraic Babylonia. Nahman was probably unaware of Yosef's objection and therefore did himself not respond to it. We probably find here an example of a phenomenon encountered frequently throughout the Talmud, where a statement by a rabbi from one locality is brought before a rabbi from a different locality. There is no face-to-face contact between them and therefore no genuine dialogue.⁹⁵ Yosef objects to "it," i.e., Nahman's statement, rather to Nahman himself. The term *Matkif*

Lah (“he objected against *it*”), in other words, indicates that when Yosef objected Nahman was “out of the picture.” Supporting this conclusion is the fact that throughout the Talmud we find no cases in which Nahman and Yosef speak to one another.⁹⁶ Most likely, therefore, neither Amora was responsible and the anonymous editors wrote the response. Modern scholarship tends to view statements by the anonymous editors as late- or even post-Amoraic,⁹⁷ and so this case can be seen as another example of later Babylonian conformity to Palestinian models.

GENEALOGY

Differences between Babylonian and Palestinian rabbis on the subject of genealogical purity further support our description of their differing relationships with non-rabbis.¹ Babylonian rabbinic consciousness of genealogical superiority helps to explain their tendency to distance themselves from non-rabbis. The sources depict Babylonian rabbis (1) publicizing the identity of Jewish families they claim to be of inferior or tainted genealogy, and (2) using genealogy as a weapon against prominent non-rabbinic Jews.

In contrast, Palestinian rabbinic sources play down the importance of genealogy, to the extent that they (1) sometimes suppress evidence of the genealogical blemishes of non-rabbis, and (2) do not depict Palestinian rabbis using genealogy as a weapon against prominent non-rabbis.² Palestinian rabbis advocate discretion in genealogical matters; this is very likely because of their relatively precarious social position, and their more intimate involvement with and dependence upon non-rabbis. These factors contribute to Palestinian rabbinic unwillingness to alienate non-rabbis by proclaiming their genealogical inferiority. As noted in previous chapters, these differences are probably connected to differences between the Persian and Greco-Roman host cultures within which the rabbis flourished.

In claiming that Babylonian sages distanced themselves from non-sages I do not suggest that they made no attempt to influence society. On the contrary, according to all available evidence Babylonian sages were very involved in society. This involvement, however, generally did not take the form of close or even casual relationships with individual non-rabbis.³ It typically took the form of competition, often of an extremely nasty character, with opposing groups vying with the rabbis for power; or of formal contacts with non-rabbis who came to the rabbis seeking judgment, halakhic rulings, sermons, and public lectures. Because of their relatively strong social position, Babylonian rabbis had little need to tread lightly where non-rabbis were concerned, and had little reason to avoid antagonizing them, for instance by concealing their genealogical blemishes.

THE SITUATION IN BABYLONIA

Babylonian rabbinic obsession with genealogy is attested, for example, in a story on b. Kiddushin 70a—b describing Rav Yehuda's clash with a man visiting Pumbedita from Nehardea. The man insults Yehuda when forced to wait behind the rabbi's attendant for service at the butcher shop. Yehuda publicly declares him to be a slave, upon learning that he habitually refers to other people as slaves. Yehuda cites as support the Tannaitic principle that "whoever invalidates others is himself invalid," along with Shmuel's claim that such a person "invalidates others with his own blemish."

The man summons Yehuda to Rav Nahman's court in Nehardea, indignantly insisting that he is a descendant of Hasmonean royalty. Yehuda cites Shmuel's ruling that anyone claiming to be of Hasmonean descent is actually a slave, according to which the man's claim actually supports Yehuda.⁴ The rabbis publicly declare the man to be a slave, and several marriage contracts are ripped up in Nehardea by people who thought they were marrying royalty but instead find themselves saddled with a family of slaves.

As Yehuda prepares to leave, he confronts an angry group of Nehardeans armed with stones. He fends them off by threatening to reveal Shmuel's tradition about two Nehardean families, "the house of the dove" and "the house of the raven," one of which is genealogically blemished, the other pure. Yehuda threatens to identify the blemished family unless the Nehardeans lay down their stones, and they toss them harmlessly into a river. Yehuda's harsh treatment of the Hasmonean aristocrat and Nehardean society is vindicated, when he successfully disarms his opponents.

The story depicts antagonism between a rabbi and a Nehardean aristocrat who lacks respect for rabbinic authority. The rabbis' dismissal of his royal pretensions has an immediate and powerful impact on society, claims the story. People tear up their marriage contracts on the basis of the rabbis' word. People fear Yehuda's genealogical expertise and try unsuccessfully to punish him for revealing ugly truths about Nehardean society.

While certainty on this issue is beyond our grasp, the family that Shmuel threatens to expose as "the house of the raven" is in all likelihood prominent in Nehardean society. Yehuda's threat to expose them is especially effective because Nehardea will be thrown into turmoil should Shmuel's tradition be made public. The impact of Yehuda's threat would be greatly reduced if an unimportant family were involved.

Antagonism between Babylonian rabbis and prominent non-rabbis is very likely also attested by sources on b. Kiddushin 70b which describe Rav Yehuda, Rav Nahman, and possibly Rava publicly proclaiming the slave status or illegitimacy of specific named individuals. We read there that "Rav Yehuda proclaimed in Pumbedita: 'Ada and Yonatan are slaves; Yehuda bar Papa is a *mamzera* [a bastard]'; [Said Rava(?):] 'Bati bar Tuvya out of

haughtiness did not receive a writ of manumission.’ Rav Nahman proclaimed in Shekanzib: ‘Ada and Ava and Yehonatan are slaves; Yizhak bar Papa is a *mamzera*.’⁵ As a rule, rabbinic sources and ancient sources in general mention only important people by name, and so these statements probably depict Babylonian rabbis casting aspersions on the lineage of prominent non-rabbis.⁶ The Bavli’s placement of these sources immediately following the story of Rav Yehuda and the Hasmonean, furthermore, suggests that they deal with the same issue: rabbinic competition with prominent non-rabbis.

Support for this claim is found in the fact that Bati bar Tuvia, publicly stigmatized by Rav Yehuda as a slave in one source cited above, is placed by another source in the company of extremely powerful men. On b. Avodah Zarah 76b, Bati appears with Shapur, the Persian king, and Mar Yehuda, the exilarch, political head of the Jewish people and liaison between the Jewish community and the Persian government.⁷ Bati is clearly a powerful man himself, as shown by the story’s portrayal of his familiarity with some of the most powerful men of his day.

The story describes the Persian king slicing a citron and handing a piece to Bati, inserting the knife ten times in the ground, then slicing a second piece and handing it to Mar Yehuda.⁸ “And is that man [i.e., himself] not an Israelite?” protests Bati, offended that the king treats him like a non-Jew. The king responds that Bati, while Jewish, does not scrupulously observe Jewish dietary laws, and the Persian king therefore takes no special precautions when handling his food.⁹

This story depicts Bati as a powerful individual who considers himself Jewish but whose observance of rabbinic law, in the opinion of the rabbis, leaves much to be desired. As noted above, Bati is also characterized by Rav Yehuda¹⁰ as a slave in b. Kiddushin 70b. It is likely that other individuals stigmatized as slaves in the same context are prominent non-rabbis, supporting my claim that Babylonian rabbis use genealogy as a weapon against non-rabbinic Jewish competitors.

Rava’s public proclamation on b. Kiddushin 70b to the effect that “Balai, Danai, Talai, Malai, Zagai are all unfit,” may further support this claim. However, it is unclear whether Rava refers to specific families or to entire localities. If the reference is to localities, then Rava’s statement may not tell us anything about Babylonian rabbinic relations with powerful opponents. It does, however, illustrate the tendency of Babylonian rabbis to publicize genealogical blemishes, which is in contrast to the Palestinian tendency to keep such information secret (see below). The willingness of Babylonian rabbis to alienate their opponents contrasts with the Palestinian preference for discretion.

It bears mentioning that according to b. Yevamot 46a, R. Yohanan learns that Jewish women in Gabla are marrying converts who did not undergo ritual immersion. Yohanan orders R. Hiyya bar Abba to “go and proclaim

that their children are *mamzerim*,” thus advocating public disclosure of their genealogical unfitness. The version of the story in y. Kiddushin 3:12 (64d), however, depicts R.Yohanan and Hiyya bar Ba discussing the status of a particular individual. According to the Yerushalmi, Yohanan scolds Hiyya for not informing the man that his conversion is invalid¹¹ and the story concludes with R.Yehoshua ben Levi’s defense of Hiyya bar Ba’s silence. The Yerushalmi, in other words, says nothing about public proclamation and the Bavli’s version is apparently colored by Babylonian practice.¹²

THE SITUATION IN PALESTINE

Palestinian rabbis claim that entire localities are unfit and render verdicts regarding the genealogical status of individual non-rabbis who come to them for judgment, but almost never do so in public (see below) and never do so in cases involving prominent non-rabbis.¹³ In addition, as noted above, Palestinian sources tend to advocate discretion rather than open confrontation.¹⁴ Statements attributed to Palestinian rabbis in both Talmuds, for example, assert that once a family’s history is no longer a matter of public record, it should remain hidden.¹⁵ We see an example of this phenomenon in a Tannaitic statement by Shimon ben Azai, who relates that he “found a genealogical scroll in Jerusalem, on which was written, ‘Mr So-and-so [*ish peloni*] is a *mamzer* from [an adulterous union with] a married woman.’”¹⁶ Presumably the scroll referred to the *mamzer* by name, but Shimon ben Azai does not. In another Palestinian statement preserved in both Talmuds, sages refuse to reveal the identity of a particular family of tainted lineage. They transmit the family’s name to their children and students, but make it a point not to do so to the general public.¹⁷

Elsewhere, a Tannaitic source rules that a person who resolves to be a nazirite if he “does not reveal [the status of] families” should become a nazirite and not reveal the status of families, despite the rabbis’ tendency to disapprove of vows of abstinence.¹⁸ Elsewhere, a Tannaitic source states that since “Moses our master did not want to reveal the identity of *mamzerim*” how much the more so is Elijah, the student of Moses, unwilling to reveal the identity of *mamzerim*.¹⁹ Our actions in the present, implies this source, should mirror those of Moses in the past and Elijah in the future, for we, like Elijah, are students of Moses and should follow his example.

Elsewhere, in m. Eduyot 8:7, we read that the family of Bet ?erifa was declared invalid “by force,” i.e., unjustifiably, and that “another” family was declared valid “by force.” As several commentators note, this mishnah explicitly names the family of Bet ?erifa but not the invalid family, apparently because of the impropriety of publicly identifying the genealogically unfit.²⁰ In addition, in y. Kiddushin 4:1 (65d) R.Hanina asserts, “Once every 60 or 70 years God brings pestilence into the world and destroys *mamzerim*.”

Along with *mamzerim*, Hanina continues, God also destroys people of sound lineage so as not to publicize sinners. God goes to extreme lengths, claims Hanina, to avoid revealing the identity of the genealogically unfit. Most likely, Hanina's statement intends in part to inform rabbis how they should conduct themselves, i.e., that it is wise to follow God in this matter and keep secret the identity of the genealogically unfit.

A story in b. Kiddushin 71a describes Palestinian rabbis struggling to come to grips with the idea that family backgrounds in Palestine are inferior to those in Babylonia. "They sat and checked," the story concludes, "until they reached danger, and then they desisted." The term "danger" in this passage, while not entirely clear, probably refers to damaging genealogical information.²¹ The information is dangerous because it implicates important members of society, and the rabbis decide that discretion is preferable to zealotry. This source, then, probably underlines the contrast between Palestinian and Babylonian attitudes, dramatizing the tendency of Palestinian rabbis to avoid confrontation with prominent members of society.²²

In a statement preserved in both Talmuds, R. Yohanan asserts that family blemishes of the "greats of the generation" are now hidden and should remain so, despite the rabbis' genealogical expertise.²³ Yohanan likewise advocates discretion, asserting that rabbis should not reveal the familial status of the generation's most important families.²⁴ The exact significance of the term "greats of the generation" is not entirely clear, since it usually refers to prominent members of the rabbinic hierarchy but can also refer to socially prominent, powerful, and/or wealthy non-rabbis.²⁵ If Yohanan refers to the latter, then this case as well supports my claim regarding Palestinian rabbinic unwillingness to antagonize prominent non-rabbis by publicizing their genealogical flaws.

Babylonian rabbis, therefore, are depicted clashing with prominent Jewish families and individuals in society. In addition, Babylonian rabbis emphasize the importance of purity of lineage to a much greater degree than do Palestinian rabbis. Finally, Babylonian rabbis publicize the genealogical blemishes of non-rabbis while Palestinian rabbis keep such information secret. These findings support the conclusions of earlier chapters that Babylonian rabbis distanced themselves from, while Palestinian rabbis had more intimate relationships with, non-rabbinic Jews.

Later Babylonian rabbis

We find only three cases in which Babylonian sages emphasize the importance of discretion in matters of genealogy.²⁶ These cases, however, involve rabbis of the mid- to late fourth century CE and thus further attest either (1) to Palestinian attitudes gaining acceptance within Babylonian circles during the later Talmudic period, or (2) to Babylonian storytellers subtly changing

their depiction of the rabbinic movement on the basis of Palestinian models.²⁷ Once again, the contrast between early Babylonian and Palestinian rabbis may not be quite as stark as the sources suggest, and the portrayals of early Babylonian rabbis may be the result of an attempt to idealize reality by exaggerating the extent of Babylonian genealogical zealotry and the degree to which all rabbis maintained strict distance between themselves and non-rabbis. As I have said, I have little doubt that the sources accurately reflect a historical distinction between the two rabbinic centers, but it may have been less extreme than the early sources suggest.

According to one of the Babylonian sources, Rav Nahman bar Yizhak decides between two versions of a Tannaitic tradition.²⁸ This tradition, cited above, states that the sages refuse to identify publicly a genealogically tainted family, but repeat the name to their children and students once or twice every seven years. The version reading “once every seven years” is preferable, argues Nahman bar Yizhak, since the less one speaks about such matters the better. Nahman bar Yizhak, in other words, knows and apparently accepts the Palestinian preference for secrecy.

According to a second Babylonian statement, Abaye finds precedent in a mishnah for the Palestinian view that once a family’s genealogical unfitness has been forgotten, it should remain so.²⁹ The fact that Abaye asserts that this Palestinian view “is also taught in a mishnah” suggests strongly that he agrees with it; further support for my characterization of later Babylonian attitudes.

Late fourth-century sages associated with the city of Nehardea, finally, accept as authoritative a version of a statement by Shmuel (quoted, significantly, by Rav Yehuda) to the effect that “all lands are presumed to be [genealogically] fit.”³⁰ This opinion contradicts the far more persistent Babylonian tradition that lands outside of Babylonia and Israel are presumed to be invalid, and that Babylonia stands at the apex of an elaborate hierarchy of genealogical purity. This version of Shmuel’s opinion as quoted by Rav Yehuda is explicitly attributed to a later Babylonian sage, further illustrating either (1) later Babylonian rabbinic receptivity to Palestinian thought, or (2) the tendency of later Babylonian authors and tradents to depict later Babylonian Amoraim in conformity with Palestinian models.

THE PALESTINIAN ATTITUDE IN BABYLONIA

The Babylonian story involving Rav Yehuda and the self-proclaimed Hasmonean, examined in detail above, betrays knowledge of the Palestinian view, but gives it an interesting Babylonian twist. To be specific, this story supplies evidence that early Babylonian rabbis know the Palestinian view, but virtually interpret it out of existence. The possibility that the story is a later Babylonian invention, of course, cannot be ruled out.

In this story, it will be recalled, Yehuda publicly declares someone a slave upon learning that he habitually refers to other people as slaves. Yehuda cites as support a Tannaitic statement which asserts that all who invalidate others are themselves unfit, together with Shmuel's statement that such a person invalidates others with his own blemish. If the attributions are to be trusted, therefore, Shmuel, an early Babylonian, knows and comments on the Palestinian view.

The story as a whole, however, creates different standards for rabbis and non-rabbis, and thus radically alters the Palestinian view, combining it with the Babylonian view and arriving at an entirely new position. Non-rabbis, claims the story, must not publicize the genealogical blemish of others. If they do, it is a sign that they themselves possess the blemish. What is in Palestine a general reluctance to talk about such matters becomes in Babylonia a prohibition applicable only to non-rabbis. Experts such as Rav Yehuda are not bound by the prohibition since their knowledge of genealogy is based on fact and true insight rather than malicious speculation. Rabbis are duty-bound to reveal what they know and perform a public service when they do so. Here the Palestinian emphasis on silence meets the Babylonian insistence on public confrontation and a new position emerges.

Rav Nahman, another Babylonian rabbi featured in the story, tries to limit the rabbis' power in this area, suggesting that Yehuda is entitled only to suspect a genealogical taint but not to announce it publicly. In the end, however, the man's claim of Hasmonean descent clinches the argument in favor of Yehuda and confirms his suspicions regarding the man's servile status. Very likely, in vindicating Yehuda so completely the story promotes his public pronouncement as the proper course of action.

It is possible that the story, which involves early rabbis, represents an early stage in the Babylonian reception of the Palestinian idea, and that the mid-fourth century CE rabbis referred to above represent a later stage in this process. It is also possible that the story was composed late in the Talmudic period, i.e., that it is a later story featuring early Amoraic protagonists, in which case the Bavli preserves two opposing later Babylonian responses to the Palestinian position: (1) acceptance (or a subtle change in the depiction of Babylonian attitudes), and (2) radical transformation.

THE BABYLONIAN ATTITUDE IN PALESTINE

We also find evidence that the Babylonian emphasis on public disclosure influenced, to a limited extent, rabbinic policy in Palestine. One source depicts R. Berekhia, a Palestinian rabbi, publicizing the genealogical unfitness of a poor *mamzer* who approaches him with a request for charity.³¹ The community (*zibura*) gathers to hear Berekhia's lecture, and he exhorts them to give charity to "this...*mamzer*." The *mamzer* complains that Berekhia

has ruined his life, but the rabbi responds by quoting a Babylonian tradition to the effect that while *mamzerim* generally live only thirty days, they live longer when the public discovers their illegitimacy.³² By publicizing the man's status, claims the story, Berekhia actually does him a tremendous favor.

This story pits a Palestinian rabbi against a poor *mamzer*, a person from the lower rungs of Jewish society.³³ In contrast to Babylonia, no Palestinian sources about genealogy describe confrontations between rabbis and the more prominent members of society.

In addition, the Palestinian story about Berekhia is concerned specifically with the problem of *mamzerut*, a particularly intractable form of genealogical unfitness which posed especially serious problems for Jewish society and the rabbinic world-view. *Mamzerut* is considered by most rabbis to be an irreparable impairment, or to be "fixable" only in the distant future when Elijah returns to usher in the messianic era.³⁴ At least one Palestinian rabbi, therefore, views the *mamzer* problem as serious enough to warrant departure from the general Palestine tendency to favor discretion.³⁵ Babylonian sources advocating public disclosure, in contrast, do not place the same singular emphasis on the *mamzer*.

It is significant, furthermore, that according to both Talmuds Babylonia is the source for the idea that the public should know the identity of *mamzerim*. The Babylonian tendency to publicize, therefore, affected rabbinic thinking in Palestine, but only with respect to the especially serious issue of the *mamzer*.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Turning to the historical significance of the above findings, it is likely that the sources depict accurately, though perhaps exaggeratedly, the existence of Babylonian rabbinic zealotry about genealogical purity, and the fact that Babylonians publicize what Palestinians hide under the rug. Very likely, this zealotry underlies and independently confirms the portrayals of Babylonian rabbinic aloofness from individual non-rabbis documented in Chapter One. The more diplomatic attitude of Palestinian rabbis on the issue of genealogy underlies and independently confirms the portrayals of close involvement between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis documented in the previous chapter. Babylonian rabbis attempt to discredit the genealogy of prominent non-rabbis via public pronouncements and courtroom confrontations, while Palestinian rabbis tend to be more accommodating, less willing to upset society and to jeopardize their own social standing by waging public battles with their competitors: the non-rabbis to whom they appeal for support.

Once again, differences between Persian and Roman society help explain differences between Palestine and Babylonia. As noted in the Introduction, Persian society throughout the Sasanian period is rigidly hierarchical and

movement between the various classes is extremely difficult.³⁶ As Isaiah Gafni observes, “a small number of well-born families” stood at the apex of Persian society.³⁷ Ehsan Yarshater writes that in Persian society

marriage outside one’s social estate...was severely discouraged, the elitist Iranian society being intent on preserving the “purity” of its blue blood. *The Letter of Tansar* cites Ardashir as declaring, “I forbid any men of birth to seek a wife among common people.... Degenerate heirs appear, who adopt boorish ways and forsake noble manners and lose their dignity in the sight of the people. They busy themselves like tradesmen with the earning of money, and neglect to garner fair fame; they marry among the vulgar and those who are not their peers, and from that birth and begetting men of low character appear.”³⁸

It is likely that the position of Babylonian Jews as a tiny minority in a foreign land was also a contributing factor. Their status as exiles among the nations fostered a desire to bolster their Jewish identity by constructing elaborate genealogical barriers against the outside world. Even Palestinian Jewry had to contend with the encroachment of foreign elements, of course; with justification even Palestine can be described as “exilic” throughout this period, but very likely the exile was experienced less acutely in Palestine than in Babylonia, which helps explain the somewhat more relaxed Palestinian attitude.

CRITICISM OF THE BABYLONIAN ATTITUDE

Our analysis of Babylonian rabbinic attitudes would not be complete without brief discussion of a tradition which runs counter to the dominant trend. To be specific, one story on b. Kiddushin 71b criticizes Babylonian preoccupation with genealogy. This story depicts the negative extremes to which this preoccupation can lead and characterizes Palestinian practice as a healthy corrective to Babylonian excess.

According to this story, Rav Yehuda refuses to arrange a marriage for his son, fearing that any prospective daughter-in-law might possess a hidden genealogical flaw. Yehuda’s fear is unreasonable, claims the story, and leads to the neglect of what the rabbis view as one of the most important human responsibilities, that of marrying and raising a family.

It is no coincidence that the story chooses as its protagonist Rav Yehuda, purported author or tradent of several of the most extreme expressions of Babylonian genealogical zealotry.³⁹ Ulla, a Palestinian sage, imparts to Yehuda some very sensible advice, reminding him that no one knows whether one’s ancestors engaged in the exotic sexual transgressions denounced by the

prophets, or what distasteful family secrets lurk in one's distant past. It therefore makes little sense to worry about someone else's hidden genealogical blemishes. "What can I do?" asks Yehuda, and Ulla advises him to follow Palestinian practice: to judge good breeding by examining behavior, and view silence and self-restraint as evidence of superior lineage.

This story, perhaps authored by a Palestinian, opposes the most extreme forms of Babylonian obsession with genealogy.⁴⁰ Even if the author is Babylonian, the story does not contradict our description of the dominant Babylonian attitude toward genealogy. It further cautions us, however, not to describe that attitude in monolithic terms. Unlike most Babylonian rabbis surveyed above, this story's author perceived Babylonian obsession with genealogy as a serious social problem, but it should be noted that the need felt by the author of the story to polemicize against Babylonian obsession with genealogy must attest to the strength and importance of that obsession for other rabbis.

HASMONEAN ROYALTY

This chapter offers further support for the thesis that Babylonian Amoraim distanced themselves from non-rabbinic Jews, in contrast to Palestinian Amoraim, who favored accommodation. Babylonian rabbis were secure enough socially to be able to challenge prominent opponents with little fear of seriously undermining their position in society. To be specific, Babylonian sources portray antagonism between Babylonian Amoraim and aristocratic non-rabbis claiming Hasmonean descent.¹ The present chapter attempts to show that these portrayals reflect social reality in rabbinic Babylonia.

Attitudes toward Hasmonean kings

Babylonian sources disapprove of Hasmonean kings, especially Yannai.² The ensuing discussion argues that this disapproval is symptomatic of Babylonian rabbinic competition with aristocrats claiming Hasmonean descent.

On b. Berakhot 29a, for example, a Tannaitic source teaches that one should not trust one's righteousness until the day of one's death. This source uses as an example Yohanan, who served as high priest for eighty years but ultimately became a Sadducee.³ Abaye claims that King Yannai and Yohanan the high priest are one and the same person, while Rava maintains that they are separate individuals. King Yannai was "wicked right from the start," contends Rava, but Yohanan the high priest was righteous from the start.⁴ Even Abaye believes that Yannai was a sinner at the end of his life, which according to rabbinic thought was an especially critical moment which determined God's judgment of an individual.⁵

A story on b. Berakhot 48a paints a particularly negative portrayal of King Yannai.⁶ The king and queen break bread, but have no one to bless for them because "he [Yannai] had killed the rabbis." The queen offers to find a man to bless for them, but makes the king swear not to torture him.⁷ She summons Shimon ben Shetach, her brother,⁸ and the king orders him to be placed between the royal couple. When Yannai points out the great honor he is paying Shimon, the sage answers that not the king, but scripture (literally,

“teaching”) pays him honor, since his placement between the king and queen fulfills a verse from Ben Sira.⁹

Statements attributed to Palestinian rabbis, or stories about Hasmoneans preserved in Palestinian rabbinic sources (such as stories told without attribution in the Palestinian Talmud) tend to be substantially less negative, or even positive.¹⁰ According to the Palestinian version of the story described above, for example, King Yannai is not a murderer of rabbis.¹¹ Shimon ben Shetach informs Yannai that three hundred nazirites need nine hundred sacrifices, and suggests that Yannai supply half and that he, Shimon, supply the other half. Yannai obliges, but becomes angry when he hears an “evil rumor” that Shimon has provided nothing. Shimon flees, but a delegation of Persians arrives and asks the king about the elder (Shimon) who wisely taught them when they visited in the past. The Persians ask the king to summon him and Yannai agrees. Shimon arrives at the banquet and stands between the king and queen. Yannai asks, “Why did you make fun of me?”, but Shimon denies having done so, pointing out that Yannai provided for the nazirites with money, while he provided for them with scripture. Yannai asks, “Why did you flee?”, which appeared to be an admission of guilt on Shimon’s part, but Shimon answers that he did so in fulfillment of a scriptural verse. Yannai orders Shimon to accept a cup of wine and bless over the food, but Shimon refuses because he hasn’t partaken of the feast. The king scolds Shimon for “persisting in his stubbornness,” and the story concludes with no further conflict between the two.

King and sage clash according to both versions, but the Yerushalmi has the king accede to Shimon’s request to provide for the nazirites, and portrays the sage as a frequent visitor to Yannai’s court, perhaps even a court sage. Unlike the Bavli, the Yerushalmi does not portray the king as a murderer of sages.

King Yannai’s massacre of the rabbis is also mentioned on b. Sanhedrin 107b:

When King Yannai killed the rabbis, R. Yehoshua ben Perahia and Jesus went to Alexandria in Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent to [Yehoshua], “From Jerusalem the holy city to you, Alexandria in Egypt: ‘My sister, my husband dwells in your midst and I sit, desolate.’”

[Yehoshua ben Perahia] arose and returned and came upon a certain inn where they paid him great honor.

He said, “How beautiful is this inn [the word translated as ‘inn’ can also refer to a female innkeeper].”

[Jesus] said to him, “Rabbi, her eyes are narrow.”

[Yehoshua ben Perahia] said to [Jesus], “Wicked one! You concern yourself with such matters?...”¹²

A strikingly similar story found on y. Hagigah 2:2 (77d)¹³ makes no mention of Yannai or any murderous Hasmonean monarch,¹⁴ further proof for my

claim regarding the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian sources. The story on y. Hagigah 2:2 (77d) reads as follows:

The men of Jerusalem wanted to appoint Yehuda ben Tabbai patriarch in Jerusalem. [Yehuda ben Tabbai] fled to Alexandria and the men of Jerusalem wrote, "From Jerusalem the Great to Alexandria the small: 'How long will my betrothed dwell with you while I am sorrowful on his account?'"

[Yehuda ben Tabbai] departed and arrived in a boat.

He said [to his students], "Do you remember what the mistress of the house, who received us, lacked?"

One of his students said to him, "Rabbi, her eye is blinking."

[Yehuda ben Tabbai] said to him, "Two [sins] are with you. First, that you suspected me [of looking at her]; second, that you looked at her."

One Palestinian source, a Tannaitic statement found on b. Kiddushin 66a, also describes a massacre of rabbis during the reign of Yannai.¹⁵ This version, however, in contrast to the Babylonian version described above, takes great pains to blame the massacre on Elazar ben Poerah, Yannai's adviser, and to divert blame away from the king.¹⁶

The story describes Yannai's capture of sixty cities and his desire to celebrate his victory along with the sages of Israel by commemorating the actions of "our fathers" when they built the Temple. Just as they ate salty dishes, so too should salty dishes be eaten now. The king and the sages eat together at golden tables, until a "scoffing, evil, worthless man" named Elazar ben Poerah tells Yannai that the Pharisees are against him. "What should I do?" asks the king, and Elazar advises him to confront them regarding the king's assumption of the high priesthood. Some people are saying that Yannai's mother was captured in Modi'im and he was therefore of tainted lineage and unfit to be high priest. One Pharisee pleads with the king to abandon the priesthood and be satisfied with "the crown of royalty," which again prompts Yannai to ask the advice of Elazar ben Poerah. Elazar advises him to "trample them down," i.e., destroy them entirely. Yannai asks, "What will happen to the Torah?", and Elazar answers that it is to be "bound up and placed in a corner. Anyone who wants to learn can come and learn." A fourth-century Babylonian Amora, Rav Nahman bar Yizhak, interrupts the Tannaitic narrative at this point to criticize Yannai's silence, which he considers tantamount to heresy. By keeping silent, Nahman claims, the king repudiates the oral torah, which depends upon the sages for its preservation. Evil sprouted forth because of Elazar ben Poerah, the story concludes, killing all of the sages of Israel, until Shimon ben Shetach restored the Torah to its former glory.¹⁷

This Palestinian story is by no means flattering to Yannai, but it does not even come near to the negative portrayal found in the Babylonian source

surveyed above. According to the Palestinian story, Yannai errs in heeding the words of his evil adviser, but he esteems the sages and shows concern for the Torah. The mastermind of the massacre is Elazar ben Poerah, and he, not Yannai, is held responsible. The harshest criticism of Yannai is attributed to a Babylonian rabbi, Rav Nahman bar Yizhak, once again showing the difference between Babylonian and Palestinian attitudes.

Comparison between versions of another story in the Bavli and Yerushalmi further supports this claim. B.Menahot 64b relates the story of a civil war waged by Yannai's sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, Hasmonean claimants to the throne. Each day those loyal to Aristobulus lower money in a basket from the wall of Jerusalem, and the forces of Hyrcanus supply them with animals necessary for the daily sacrifices since both sides wish to maintain the uninterrupted operation of the Temple cult since the welfare of all Israel depends on it. A sage knowledgeable in Greek wisdom informs the supporters of Hyrcanus that as long as the sacrificial cult continues undisturbed they will be unable to capture Jerusalem. They heed his advice, and the next day place a pig in the basket. The pig sticks its hoofs into the city wall, causing the land of Israel to tremble for four hundred miles in every direction. At that moment, the story concludes, "they said, 'cursed is the man who raises a pig, and cursed is the man who teaches his son Greek wisdom.'"

This source in the Bavli does not paint a flattering portrayal of the Hasmoneans: they are engaged in a civil war, and one group is willing to disrupt the daily sacrificial offerings in order to defeat the other.

On y. Berakhot 4:1 (7b), in contrast, R.Simon quotes R.Yehoshua ben Levi's report that in the days of the Greeks, "they would lower two baskets of gold and raise two lambs." Once they lowered two baskets of gold and raised two kids of goats. At that moment, "God enlightened their eyes" and they found two unblemished sheep in the Temple's chamber of sheep. This story makes no explicit mention of a civil war led by Hasmonean princes, and perhaps omits reference to the Hasmoneans in an attempt to avoid damage to their reputations.¹⁸ The Bavli's version¹⁹ is harsher on the Hasmoneans than the Yerushalmi's, which supports my claim regarding differing attitudes in the two rabbinic centers.

In addition, y. Taanit 2:12 (66a) paints what it considers to be a flattering portrayal of a member of the Hasmonean house.²⁰ The Yerushalmi tells the story of a Greek king passing through the land of Israel on his way to Alexandria. The Greek king sees Jerusalem and promises to destroy "this tower" upon his return. The Hasmonean attacks, killing Greek soldiers until he reaches the king's carriage. Hacking off the king's hand and head, he impales them, writes underneath them, "The mouth that spoke in guilt and the hand that reached out in pride," and hangs them on a pike facing Jerusalem. The actions of this heroic Hasmonean are celebrated thereafter as the Day of Nicanor.

Further proof that Palestinian sources are pro-Hasmonean may be supplied by *m. Sukkah* 4:9. According to this mishnah, the priest who pours the water libation on Sukkot receives explicit instructions to raise his hands, for once “someone” poured the water onto his feet and the entire people pelted him with citrons. Josephus, unlike the mishnah, identifies the priest as Alexander Jannaeus,²¹ and the Palestinian rabbinic source may have deliberately suppressed the name out of respect for the Hasmonean king.²²

At first glance, Babylonian rabbinic disapproval of Hasmonean kings appears strange: why do we find this disapproval in Amoraic Babylonia, far from the center of Hasmonean power, and at a distant chronological remove from the last Hasmonean rulers? A story on *b. Kiddushin* 70a–b, examined in a preliminary fashion in Chapter Two, above, sheds light on this question.

According to this story, it will be recalled, a Nehardean man visiting Pumbedita insults Rav Yehuda, in response to which Yehuda has him publicly declared a slave. The case comes before Rav Nahman in Nehardea, where the man protests that he can hardly be considered a slave since he is of Hasmonean descent. Yehuda responds by citing a source which states explicitly that anyone claiming Hasmonean descent in this day and age is actually a slave.²³ Nahman upholds Yehuda’s ruling regarding the man’s slave status, and as a result, “several marriage contracts are torn up in Nehardea” by people who thought they were marrying into a royal family but were actually marrying slaves.

This story portrays an attempt by rabbis to discredit self-proclaimed Hasmoneans in Amoraic Babylonia. While certainty on this issue is not possible, this portrayal very probably reflects social reality, given the anti-Hasmonean sources surveyed above. It reflects the fact that some Jews in Babylonia, hundreds of years after the Hasmonean dynasty ostensibly came to an end in Palestine, claimed descent from Hasmonean royalty and used this claim to enhance their position in Jewish society.²⁴ Babylonian rabbis opposed this claim, although it is doubtful that they did so with the complete public success depicted by the story on *b. Kiddushin* 70a–b.²⁵ Instead, this story probably reflects a certain amount of rabbinic wishful thinking, rather than a fully accurate portrayal of popular response to the rabbis’ efforts to discredit their enemies.

In contrast, numerous sources attest to Babylonian rabbinic acceptance of exilarchic claims of Davidic descent. The Babylonian sources demonstrate a political decision on the part of the rabbis, a calculated choice between rival dynasties.²⁶

Another story in the *Bavli* supports this conclusion. It depicts Yannai negatively and is embedded in a discussion which recognizes the legitimacy of Davidic kings.²⁷ The discussion is as follows: *m. Sanhedrin* 2:2 states that a king neither judges nor is he judged; he neither testifies nor is he testified against. On *b. Sanhedrin* 19a, Rav Yosef asserts that the mishnah only refers

to kings of the northern tribes of Israel, but kings of the Davidic dynasty both judge and are judged.

The anonymous editors ask why kings of the northern tribes are excluded from the judicial process and they answer by quoting a story:

Because of a story involving a slave of King Yannai, who killed someone.²⁸

Shimon ben Shetach said to the sages, "Examine him and let us judge him."

They sent to [the king]: "Your slave killed someone."

[The king] sent [the slave] to them.

[The sages] sent [to the king]: "You should also come here. The testimony must be in the presence of the owner,' (Exodus 21:29), said the Torah. Let the owner of the ox come and stand with his ox."

[The king] came and sat.

Shimon ben Shetach said to him, "King Yannai, stand up and let them testify against you. Not before us do you stand, but before He who spoke and the world came into being, as it is said, 'And the two men who have the dispute shall stand before God'" (Deut 19:17).

[Yannai] said to him, "Not as you say, but as your colleagues say." He turned to the right and they pressed their faces to the ground. He turned to the left and they pressed their faces to the ground. Shimon ben Shetach said to them, "Deep thinkers are you? Let the One who knows our thoughts come and punish you."

Immediately [the angel] Gabriel came and struck them to the ground and they died. At that moment they said, "A king neither judges nor is he judged; he neither testifies nor is he testified against."

What is the meaning of this discussion? Why does Rav Yosef differentiate between Davidic kings and kings of the northern tribes? Very likely, Yosef's distinction between Davidic and non-Davidic kings reflects his belief that Davidic kings will judge and testify honestly and will not take revenge on those who judge or testify against them. Kings of the northern tribes, however, are wicked and not to be trusted. The mishnah excludes them from the judicial process to avoid disasters such as the one described in the story.²⁹

To whom does Yosef refer when he excludes kings of the northern tribes? Is he declaring the illegitimacy of specific "kings" of his own era, or those of the distant past who are no longer identifiable? The editors who use the Yannai story to explicate Yosef's statement most likely believe that Hasmoneans are among the illegitimate Jewish rulers excluded by Yosef; this amounts to further support for my claim that Babylonian rabbis polemicize against contemporary aristocrats claiming Hasmonean descent.

The editors who link the Yannai story and Yosef's statement view Yannai's actions as representative of the actions of all non-Davidic kings, and therefore as a reason for excluding them from the judicial process.³⁰

Along the same lines, Yosef's claim about Davidic kings is probably a statement not only about biblical times, but also about the political realities of his own era. Yosef recognizes the legitimacy of the exilarch, who buttressed his claims to govern the Jewish people in Babylonia by claiming Davidic descent. Yosef recognizes the exilarch's power to judge, but claims that he must do so in conformity to rabbinic law.

BIBLE-READING NON-JEWS AND HERETICS

This chapter argues that Palestinian rabbis had frequent interactions with Bible-reading non-Jews (for example, Christians and Gnostics) and *Minim*¹ (heretics), but that Babylonian rabbis did not.² This difference is further evidence of the insular nature of rabbis in Babylonia and of rabbis' greater involvement with non-rabbis in Palestine.

HERESY AS A SERIOUS SOCIAL PROBLEM IN PALESTINE

The urgency and persistence with which Palestinian sources forbid contact between Palestinian rabbis on the one hand and *Minim* and Christians on the other suggests strongly that such contact took place and was probably routine. Several Palestinian sources urge rabbis and their families to avoid *Minim* and Christians, contact with whom is depicted as dangerous but sought after because of their skill as healers and the attractiveness of their words. According to one story, for example, the Roman government arrests R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus on suspicion of being a *Min* (heretic), and Eliezer interprets his arrest as punishment for improperly close contact with Yaakov of Kefar Sekhanya, a follower of Jesus. Eliezer believes he deserves punishment for listening to, and approving of, Yaakov's quotation of a statement by Jesus.³

The message of this story in its diverse contexts is that non-rabbis and outsiders pose a serious threat to rabbinic Judaism. Even, or especially, when these outsiders state opinions and offer interpretations which suit rabbinic tastes, they are to be avoided at all costs. They are dangerous, in no small part because of the attractiveness of their words. The story depicts a great sage seduced by the words of a follower of Jesus and punished as a result. Certainly lesser rabbis (and non-rabbinic Jews?) will suffer even graver consequences, warns the story, if they fail to keep their distance from such dangerous men.⁴

The vehemence of the Palestinian rabbinic polemic against contact with *Minim* and Christians is difficult to understand if the issue was largely of theoretical importance. Most likely, it constituted a serious social problem as far as some rabbis were concerned. Robert Wilken has similarly inferred from the vehemence of John Chrysostom's denunciations of Christian attendance at Jewish synagogues and adoption of Jewish practices that both phenomena were widespread in fourth century CE Antioch.⁵

Elsewhere, Palestinian sources prohibit social and sexual intercourse with *Minim*, forbid their food and drink, and label their children *mamzerim* ("illegitimate"). These sources also forbid doing business and conversing with *Minim*, as well as teaching their children a trade. R. Tarfon asserts that he would enter an idolatrous temple to escape death at the hands of a pursuer, but that he would not enter "their houses" of worship; this is because idolaters deny God without recognizing him, while *Minim* recognize God but nevertheless deny Him.⁶ Once again, the need of these sources to engage in strenuous polemic against contact with heretics suggests strongly that such contact was routine.

The Palestinian attitude is also expressed on t. Hullin 2:20–23 and b. Avodah Zarah 27b, which forbid Jews to have contact with followers of Jesus and in particular to employ them as healers. R. Elazar ben Dama has been bitten by a snake and wants to be cured by Yaakov of Kefar Sekhanya in the name of Jesus. Elazar ben Dama asserts that the Torah permits his cure, but he dies before revealing his proof. At the conclusion of the story Elazar ben Dama's uncle, R. Yishmael, expresses joy that his nephew died without transgressing the words of the rabbis.

The story implies that cure by a follower of Jesus is such a sensitive issue that Elazar ben Dama must be prevented forcibly from revealing his scriptural proof. Rabbis (and Jews in general?) may be swayed by Elazar ben Dama's words, and had he been cured in Jesus' name many might have been drawn from rabbinic piety. Elazar ben Dama's death just before revealing his scriptural proof shows the hand of God, who intervenes at precisely the proper moment to insure removal of the temptation to follow heresy.

Another story involving a Palestinian rabbi also emphasizes the attractiveness of *Minim* and the need to avoid contact with heretics. This story, found in Kohelet Rabbah 1:8,⁷ involves R. Yonatan, a Palestinian rabbi whose student has fled to the *Minim*. The *Minim* invite Yonatan to join them in performing "deeds of loving-kindness" for a bride, and he accepts the invitation, only to find them having group sex with a young girl. Yonatan flees, the *Minim* pursue, and he arrives home and locks the door in their faces. They taunt him, boasting that had he turned and looked at them, he instead would be pursuing them. This story also depicts *Minim* as irresistible to rabbis if they examine it too closely.

Palestinian sources in Sifrei Devarim and Avot de-R. Natan bear the same message.⁸ In the former, R. Shimon ben Menasya advises against drinking

“turbid water” and being “drawn to the words of *Minim*.”⁹ In Avot de-R. Natan, R. Yehoshua ben Korha advises against “going to the *Minim* and listening to their words” lest one be influenced by their actions and stumble as a result.¹⁰

A story on y. Shabbat 14:4 (14d) likewise dramatizes the danger of contact with Christian healers, although it reflects a less condemnatory attitude than that described above. A grandson of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, one of the most prominent rabbis of his generation, is cured by “a person” in the name of Yeshu Pandira (Jesus). Discovering what transpired, Yehoshua ben Levi announces that it would have been better if his grandson had died. The story’s anonymous narrator, quoting Ecclesiastes, declares, “It was like an error which issued forth from a ruler,”¹¹ and concludes the story with a report of the grandson’s death.

The story suggests that words have power, and that even words spoken in error influence the course of human events. Yehoshua ben Levi’s words are “like an error which issued forth from a ruler,” but once out of his mouth they lead in some unexplained fashion to the grandson’s death.

After the fact, this story claims, a rabbi (and a non-rabbinic Jew?) cured by Christians is not better off dead. Christianity’s dangerous attraction is not so great that under all circumstances death is better than life. Indeed, the story refers to Yehoshua ben Levi’s wish for the death of his grandson as “an error.” The stories examined earlier implacably oppose contact between rabbis and followers of Jesus, and they differ in tone and emphasis from the present story, which focuses on permissibility rather than prohibition.

Nevertheless, this Palestinian story likewise perceives contact with Christian healers as a problem. Such contact is to be avoided, although once the contact has taken place one should not wish for the death of the “victim” of the healing. The need to compose such a story indicates the gravity of the problem it struggles to resolve.

THE SITUATION IN BABYLONIA

Babylonian sources, in contrast, have nothing to say on the subject of the danger of rabbinic contact with *Minim* and Christians, apparently because such contact was too rare to be considered a problem. That contact was rare in Babylonia and relatively common in Palestine was in part because of the relative scarcity of Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics in the Persian Empire and their greater prevalence in Roman Palestine. The Christianization of the Roman Empire was, of course, accelerated as a result of the conversion of Constantine in 312 CE, but this singular event helped stimulate a process which had begun generations earlier and which affected even remote corners of the Empire.

Nevertheless, Babylonian rabbis could have interacted with Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics had they so desired. Christian settlements and centers of learning, most notably the Christian academy at Nisibis,¹² flourished in the neighborhood of Babylonian rabbinic strongholds. Manichees and other Gnostics were significant presences in Persia throughout this period. The findings of the present chapter, therefore, are very likely part of the larger pattern of intentional Babylonian rabbinic isolation from and Palestinian rabbinic involvement with non-rabbis. The following discussion further supports this claim.

Disputes

Rabbinic accounts of disputes between rabbis and *Minim*, despite reservations about their historicity which will be discussed later, support our claim regarding Palestinian rabbinic contact, and Babylonian rabbinic lack of contact, with *Minim*. To be specific, Palestinian sources record numerous disputes between rabbis and *Minim* whereas disputes of this kind are very rare in Babylonian sources.¹³

The term “dispute” refers to dialogues, or, more precisely, purported dialogues between rabbis and *Minim* concerning beliefs, practices, and interpretations of biblical verses.

These disputes have clearly been reworked at least in part. First, the rabbinic protagonists always have the final word and the “right side” always prevails in the end.¹⁴ Second, the rabbinic compilations do not accurately record the names of the *Minim* who participate in these dialogues but rather give us rough stereotypes and reasonable approximations. To be specific, *Minim* or Christians are referred to as Yaakov in six contexts throughout Talmudic and midrashic literature, and in only two contexts by names other than Yaakov.¹⁵ In both of the exceptional cases, the requirements of a midrashic play on words determine the names.

The following *Minim* or Christians are referred to by name: (1) t. Hullin 2:22–23 (and parallels) —Yaakov of Kefar Sama¹⁶; (2) t. Hullin 2:24 (and parallels) —Yaakov of Kefar Sikhnin¹⁷; (3) b. Megillah 23a—Yaakov Mina’ah; (4) b. Sukkah 48b—Sasson and Simha; (5) b. Sanhedrin 43a¹⁸ —Matai, Nakai, Boni, Nezer, and Todah; (6) b. Avodah Zarah 28a—Yaakov Mina’ah; (7) b. Hullin 84a—Yaakov Mina’ah; and (8) Kohelet Rabbah 7:26—Yaakov of Kefar Navoraia.

As noted above, both cases in which *Minim* are referred to by names other than Yaakov depend on midrashic wordplay. On b. Sukkah 48b, the names Sasson and Simha are narrative devices showing the folly and contentiousness of heretics and illustrating how rabbis outwit their enemies. For example, Sasson tells R.Abahu that the verse, “You shall draw water with Sasson (literally, ‘joy’),” foretells his (Sasson’s) future glory, when Jews

will be his servants. Abahu observes that the verse does not say “You shall draw water *for* Sasson,” but “*with* Sasson.” Scripture, claims Abahu, foretells not Sasson’s glory but his horrible fate after death, when Jews will literally draw water with Sasson, i.e., with a vessel made from his skin.

The second exceptional case is a statement on b. Sanhedrin 43a which lists the names of five disciples of Jesus, making all five the basis for scriptural puns.¹⁹ One example will suffice to illustrate this point. The fifth disciple, Todah, claims that the verse “A Psalm of Thanksgiving (Todah)”²⁰ foretells his future glory. He understands the verse to mean “A Psalm for [the person named] Todah.” The rabbis, in response, cite the verse “He who sacrifices a Thank-offering [Todah] honors me,”²¹ understanding it to mean “He who slaughters [the person named] Todah honors Me.” Scripture refers to Todah’s execution, not his glory.

Very likely, therefore, rabbinic storytellers make little or no effort to reproduce the actual names of *Minim* or Christians, and refer to them by stereotypical names. In all likelihood, the content of the dialogues is also stereotypical, with rabbinic authors telling stories about “John Doe Heretic” and attempting to reproduce “typical” discussions rather than transcripts of actual dialogues. It follows that overly careful attempts to determine the precise heresy described in the sources are probably misguided. These sources give us rough stereotypes and sketches drawn in extremely broad strokes rather than finely nuanced portraits or scientifically precise descriptions.²²

Historicity

Other factors, however, argue forcefully in support of the general historicity, distorted though it may be, of the Talmudic portrayals.²³ First, the Talmudic record of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic disputes with *Minim* conforms well to conclusions reached in other chapters throughout this book. In case after case, the sources depict Babylonian rabbinic contact with non-rabbis as rare and Palestinian rabbinic contact with non-rabbis as relatively common. We are dealing either with an extraordinarily thorough and clever pseudepigrapher or with a historical phenomenon. The present finding, therefore, which reveals the same pattern of Babylonian aloofness and Palestinian involvement, very likely reflects a historical reality.

Second, we concluded in the first half of the present chapter that the vehemence and stridency with which rabbinic sources prohibit rabbinic contact with *Minim* is a powerful argument in favor of such contact having frequently happened. These sources condemn such contact as dangerous, as leading to temptations which rabbis might be unable to resist. The sources presently under discussion, in contrast, while attesting to contact between rabbis and *Minim*, view it as harmless and even desirable, enabling rabbis to demonstrate the folly and stupidity of heretical beliefs. The two halves of

the present chapter, therefore, attest to the same phenomenon from opposing perspectives. The Talmuds therefore contain sources which derive from opposing sources and which independently confirm the same picture of the frequency of Palestinian rabbinic contact with *Minim*. In other words, the specific stories are not historical—some are plainly impossible—but they reflect a historical situation.

Third, an important Talmudic story on b. Avodah Zarah 4a portrays Palestinian rabbis as experts in scriptural exegesis and therefore able to respond to questions by *Minim*, in contrast to Babylonian rabbis who are portrayed as novices in this area and therefore unable to respond. According to this story, R. Abahu explains why he is well-versed in scripture but Rav Sheshet is not: “We [Palestinian rabbis] who are frequent among you [heretics] take it upon ourselves to examine [scripture]. They [Babylonian rabbis] do not examine [scripture].”²⁴ In other words, the paucity of contact between Babylonian rabbis and Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics meant that Babylonian rabbis were not confronted by a significant scripturally based challenge, a situation which led to the relative neglect of scriptural exegesis in rabbinic Babylonia. And in fact, corresponding to the historical picture presupposed by this story, midrash is to a large extent a Palestinian phenomenon. All of our extant midrashic compilations were edited in Palestine, and relatively few scriptural comments are attributed to Babylonian rabbis.

Fourth, sources external to the Talmud support the historicity of the Talmud’s portrayal of the situation in Babylonia. As noted in previous chapters, class boundaries in Persia were extremely difficult to penetrate; late antique Persian society resembled the caste system of India. Zoroastrianism, like Judaism, has an elaborate system of purity laws, and according to Mary Boyce these laws were “One potent means of keeping Iranians apart” from foreign elements.²⁵ The Babylonian rabbinic relationship with *Minim*, or rather the lack thereof, were very likely influenced by Zoroastrian practices. Talmudic portrayals of Babylonian rabbinic separation from Bible-reading non-Jews conform to the dominant Persian culture.

These factors support the historicity of Talmudic disputes between rabbis and *Minim*. The disputes, therefore, reinforce the conclusions of earlier chapters regarding the insular quality of Babylonian rabbis and the greater involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis.

PALESTINIAN SOURCES IN THE BAVLI

Before we conclude this chapter, it is necessary to confront a methodological difficulty posed by the Talmudic record of disputes between rabbis and *Minim*. This difficulty has a further impact on the question of historicity posed above. I refer to the fact that disputes between rabbis and *Minim* are

virtually non-existent in Palestinian documents such as the Yerushalmi but are relatively common in the Bavli. The Bavli records many disputes between heretics and Palestinian rabbis, but Palestinian compilations record fewer than a handful of such disputes. Why does the Bavli depict Palestinian rabbis as frequent debaters with heretics but Palestinian compilations do not?

One possible explanation is the general tendency of Palestinian compilations to contain relatively little dialogue, even dialogue between rabbis. So the paucity of disputes between rabbis and *Minim* might simply be part of this general tendency. The relative abundance of these disputes in the Bavli is not surprising, therefore, since Babylonian sources are much richer in dialogue. Tannaitic sources are likewise relatively sparse in dialogue, and the absence of such disputes from Tannaitic sources might likewise be a function of the general paucity of Tannaitic dialogue.

A second possibility is that we have uncovered different Babylonian and Palestinian uses of terminology. Were we to widen the scope of our investigation, we might find that literature from the two localities contains roughly the same number of disputes between Palestinian rabbis and heretics. Palestinian documents perhaps avoid the term *Min* while the Bavli does not. A full study of all dialogues between rabbis on the one hand and Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics on the other may reveal that Babylonian and Palestinian compilations do not differ on this issue as dramatically as focus on the term *Min* would indicate.²⁶ In other words, it may be that Palestinian compilations depict Palestinian rabbis conversing with heretics about as frequently as do Babylonian compilations, but Palestinian compilations generally do not refer to them as *Minim*.

A third, somewhat less likely possibility is that disputes between rabbis and *Minim* were deliberately suppressed in Palestine in an effort to avoid insulting the Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics who were prominent in the Roman world. Fear of reprisal might have led to the suppression of stories explicitly critical of non-rabbinic doctrines and biblical interpretations.²⁷ I consider this explanation less likely because I doubt, along with several recent scholars, that Palestinian Jews were subjected to threats of physical violence by *Minim*, including Christians, during the Talmudic period.²⁸

RAINMAKING

This chapter will examine other sources which portray (1) Babylonian rabbinic aloofness from, and Palestinian rabbinic involvement with, non-rabbis; and (2) the stronger position of Babylonian rabbis in society and the weaker position of their Palestinian counterparts.¹ As noted in the Introduction, above, distinctions between Talmudic portrayals of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis conform well to distinctions between the Roman and Persian Empires, a significant argument in favor of their historicity.

The present chapter focuses on rainmaking stories, narratives featuring attempts to convince God, the heavenly powers, or the forces of nature to bring rain during a time of drought. Statements about rainmaking, i.e., declarative statements or interpretations not in narrative form, also inform the discussion as do a small number of stories in which rabbis solicit the help of heavenly powers in the face of other communal emergencies, for example, epidemics.²

Non-rabbis as prayer leaders

The above-mentioned sources give examples of Babylonian rabbinic aloofness from and Palestinian rabbinic involvement with non-rabbis.³ *Y. Taanit* 1:4 (64b), for instance, contains several stories which portray non-rabbis praying effectively for rain and rabbis informing them that their prayers were answered on account of their good deeds.⁴ One story portrays a donkey driver praying and receiving a favorable response. The rabbis summon him for questioning, whereupon he describes his righteous action and the rabbis pronounce him “worthy of praying and being answered.”

Other stories in *y. Taanit* 1:4 (64b) follow the same pattern, involving (1) “a certain person,” and (2) a pantomimist who “adorns the theatre, engages the musicians and dancers, brings their clothes to the bath house, claps hands and dances before them, and clashes the cymbals before them,” extremely unsavory activities from the rabbinic perspective.⁵ In both cases, rabbis visit

the non-rabbi and pronounce him “worthy of praying and being answered” when he describes for them his performance of a single praiseworthy deed.⁶

The Bavli’s picture of Palestinian rabbis is substantially the same. B.Taanit 24a, for example, depicts Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Rabbi) declaring an unsuccessful fast, whereupon Ilfa successfully prays for rain.⁷ As in the stories in y. Taanit 1:4 (64b), Rabbi asks Ilfa by what merit he receives such an extraordinary sign of divine favor, and Ilfa answers that he supplies people with wine for the fulfillment of important rituals. The similarity between this story and other narratives in the Yerushalmi and Bavli, which certainly involve non-rabbis, makes it likely that this account also features a non-rabbi.

Of course I am aware of the possibility that these stories are fictional, and are sermons designed to impress upon the rabbis’ audience the importance of the fulfillment of religious rituals as defined by the rabbis. The diverse sources described in previous chapters, however, which repeatedly led to the same conclusions from diverse perspectives, increase the likelihood that the sources presently under consideration, while not literally true and very likely distorting and idealizing reality, nevertheless have a basis in reality.

The only comparable story involving Babylonian protagonists features either Rav or Rava in b. Taanit 24a,⁸ and it is difficult to view as mere coincidence the fact that both Babylonians are depicted throughout the Talmuds as especially susceptible to Palestinian influence.⁹ The story features a representative of the community, i.e., a prayer leader, who successfully prays for rain following Rav’s (or Rava’s) unsuccessful fast. Rav (or Rava) asks by what merit the man receives divine favor, and learns that he takes no money for teaching the Bible to children of poor families.

Several stories, on b. Taanit 21b (twice, involving Shmuel and Rav Nahman); 22a (involving rabbis in Bei Lapat); and 25a (involving Rav Papa) depict Babylonian rabbis as prayer leaders in times of communal emergency. With the exception of the story involving Rav or Rava on b. Taanit 24a (see above), no Babylonian rabbis assign comparable notes to non-rabbis.

In addition to the differing portrayals of rabbinic relations with non-rabbis, another significant feature of these narratives is their assignment of prominent leadership roles to Palestinian non-rabbis. Statements attributed to Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, exclude non-rabbis from participation in the rainmaking process and make of it a rabbinic affair. M.Taanit 1:4, for example, rules that “individuals” begin to fast if no rain has fallen by the seventeenth of Marheshwan. Rav Huna, a Babylonian Amora, claims that the “individuals” referred to by the mishnah are “rabbis.” This Tannaitic source, therefore, which very likely assigns a role to non-rabbis in the rainmaking process, is interpreted by the Babylonian Amora to refer exclusively to rabbis.¹⁰ The Palestinian Talmud contains no comparable definition of the mishnaic term.

Similarly, a Tannaitic source on b. Taanit 16a rules that if an elder is present during a communal fast for rain he addresses the community and

exhorts them to repent. If not, a sage speaks, but note the order of preference: first an elder, then a sage, implying that the elder need not be a sage. Abaye, a Babylonian Amora, finds this implication unacceptable and interprets the Tannaitic source to refer to an elder who is a sage.

Very likely, these differing portrayals accurately reflect a difference between non-rabbis in the two Jewish centers. They further support our claim that Babylonian rabbis had powers which their Palestinian counterparts, because of their weaker position in society, had to share with non-rabbis; non-rabbis occupied leadership roles in Palestine which were unavailable to them in Babylonia. The findings of the present chapter provide further proof of the greater fluidity of Greco-Roman society, with leadership roles available to common people in Roman Palestine which were unavailable to them in Persia.

The present chapter's characterization of Palestinian Jewish sources receives striking confirmation from a study by Peter Brown. Brown observes,¹¹

The eastern Church had entered on to what came to strike early medieval western observers as a baffling "crisis of overproduction" of the holy. More men were accepted as bearers or agents of the supernatural on earth, and in a far greater variety of situations, than came to be tolerated in Western Europe.... For at any one time, the man who enjoyed most favour with God in Heaven might be, not St. Anthony, but a doctor in Alexandria, not St. Macanus, but a farmer in an Egyptian village, and even, who knows, an imperial inspector of brothels in Alexandria. The paradox of sanctity enabled the holy to scatter itself widely throughout Byzantine society.... At the bottom, it fell heavily on prostitutes as it never fell on the equally whore-laden towns of Italy.¹²

In other words, the eastern, i.e., Byzantine Christian world, geographically close to the western Jewish world documented in the Palestinian Talmud, exhibits the same tendency to treat people who are not religious professionals as "loci of the sacred."¹³ The western Christian world resembles the Babylonian (i.e., Persian) rabbinic world described above, although obviously this similarity is subject to a tremendous cultural and geographical divide.¹⁴

Rabbinic rainmaking and the larger Jewish community

Rainmaking stories reveal a second respect in which Palestinian rabbis were more intimately involved in society than were their Babylonian counterparts: several Palestinian rainmaking stories depict community involvement or interest in the activities of rabbis. In addition, several Palestinian comments portray Palestinian rabbinic actions as of consequence to the larger, non-

rabbinic Jewish community. This communal dimension is absent from stories about Babylonian rabbis.

A story involving R.Hanina, R.Yehoshua ben Levi, and the people of Sepphoris in *y. Taanit* 3:4 (66c), for example, revolves around the people's reaction to the failure of Hanina's prayer for rain. The people blame Hanina, but actually, Hanina explains, the failure of his prayer is the result of their sins rather than of his shortcomings. The proper response to Hanina's failure, claims the story, is communal acceptance of responsibility and willingness to hear and obey the Torah's message.

Another story in *y. Taanit* 3:4 (66c—d) likewise depicts Palestinian rabbinic rainmaking activity as taking place in the presence of and under the watchful eye of the Jewish community. R.Akiba explains to the gathered assembly the embarrassing failure of R.Lazar's prayer for rain. Concern for the reputations of great rabbis in the eyes of the community motivates this story, which argues that neither Akiba's success nor Lazar's failure reveals their respective merits in the eyes of God. God's will is extremely difficult to fathom, and the failure of a rabbi to pray effectively for rain should not induce the community to respect him less, since his failure may be evidence of divine favor rather than disfavor.

The Bavli's depiction of Palestine is substantially the same. According to *b. Taanit* 25b, for example, rain falls promptly in response to a fast. Samuel the Lesser cautions the community not to interpret their speedy success as evidence of the community's righteousness, since God's ways are mysterious and once again what appears to be evidence of divine favor may actually be displeasure. The community should maintain constant vigilance against sin, interpreting events in the worst possible light and thereby guarding against complacency and self-satisfaction.

According to a story in *b. Taanit* 14a–b, R.Yehuda Nesiah declares thirteen fasts, all of which are unsuccessful. Yehuda wants to declare an additional fast, but R.Ami objects that additional fasts would unduly burden the community. The issue of "community burden" may reflect (1) concern for adverse community reaction to rabbinic demands, and/or (2) reluctance to saddle people with impossibly heavy demands. In either case, this story depicts the actions of rabbis as of consequence to the larger Jewish community.

Similarly, *m. Taanit* 2:9 rules, "We do not impose on the community the first of a series of fasts on Thursday," so as not to "break the market," i.e., send prices skyrocketing. *M.Taanit* 2:10 rules that we do not impose on the community a fast on the first of the month, on Hannukah, or on Purim, since these are days of communal celebration.

The phenomenon currently under discussion, like that described in the previous section, very likely attests to diverse relationships between rabbis and non-rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia. So once again we see that Babylonian rabbis tended to be aloof and Palestinian rabbis more fully

integrated into society, in conformity with the larger Persian and Roman societies within which the Jews flourished.

The private nature of Babylonian fasts very likely reflects in part rabbinic obedience to Shmuel's dictum that with the exception of the Ninth of Av, no public fasts take place in Babylonia.¹⁵ There was no patriarch in Babylonia, and rabbis there evidently felt that legitimate public fasts were not possible without the participation of the patriarch.¹⁶ It is likely, then, that the lack of communal participation in Babylonia reflects in part halakhic differences between Palestine and Babylonia.

In all probability, however, these halakhic differences are symptomatic of larger societal differences, since halakhah is nourished and influenced by the outside world and does not develop in a vacuum. To reduce matters to a halakhic disagreement, therefore, explains very little, leaving unanswered the question of why Shmuel made his statement to begin with, and why later generations chose to adhere to his view rather than contradict it, explain it away, or claim, for example, that the exilarch in Babylonia serves the same function as the patriarch in Palestine.¹⁷

Part II

EXEGETICAL STUDIES

KING DAVID

Attitudes toward King David

Part One of this book established with reasonable certainty that Babylonian and Palestinian rabbis related differently to other groups in society. Babylonian rabbis had little intimate contact with non-rabbis and Palestinian rabbis had substantially more, and Babylonian rabbis occupied a relatively strong position in society whereas Palestinian rabbis were relatively weak. Part Two uses these conclusions to account for several distinctions between Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic commentary on the Bible.

My claim, it bears emphasizing, is not that these distinctions are understandable only by means of the conclusions of Part One. Some of the distinctions admit of more than a single explanation. As noted in the Introduction, however, it is preferable to explain related phenomena by means of a single principle rather than via diverse *ad hoc* explanations.

One of the best tests of a theory is the ability of that theory to account for or predict diverse phenomena. The fact that the conclusions of Part One help explain several aspects of rabbinic scriptural commentary is an important argument in support of these conclusions.

Turning now to Palestinian and Babylonian scriptural commentary, we find that rabbis from the two localities display different attitudes toward King David. These different attitudes, we will argue, are easily explicable as the result of differing Palestinian and Babylonian relationships with non-rabbinic Jews.¹ Palestinian rabbis, we will argue, in keeping with their greater involvement with non-rabbis and their weaker position in society, tend to depict David as sinless and saintly. They portray him positively to defend him, and by extension themselves, against the scorn or criticism of non-rabbinic Jews. Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, kept their distance from non-rabbinic Jews and occupied a strong position in society. They therefore felt little need to defend David, and by extension themselves, from attack by non-rabbinic Jews.²

So Palestinian rabbis tend to praise David, to whitewash his sins, to make his behavior conform to rabbinic halakhah, and to portray him as a rabbi.

In contrast, Babylonian Amoraim make explicit mention of David's sins, with little attempt to gloss them over or to reconcile conflicts between his conduct and that mandated by rabbinic law.

Again it would be a mistake to exaggerate the differences between Babylonian and Palestinian rabbis. Their statements about David are not diametrically opposed, but they do exhibit clearly opposing tendencies. Palestinian rabbis praise David and downplay his sins much more frequently than do Babylonian rabbis,³ and Babylonian rabbis exhibit a much greater tendency to acknowledge David's sins than do Palestinian rabbis.⁴ Palestinian rabbis, furthermore, tend to acknowledge what are from the rabbinic perspective only minor sins,⁵ while Babylonian rabbis acknowledge his most serious crimes.

Palestinian attitudes

Turning first to Palestinian rabbis, a Tannaitic source on b. Sanhedrin 19b, for example, cites R. Yosi's students asking their teacher, "How is it that David married two sisters during their lifetimes?" Yosi answers, "He married Mikhal after the death of Merav," a response which squares David's conduct with rabbinic halakhah. Another Tanna, R. Yehoshua ben Korha, asserts that David's betrothal of Merav was in error and he was therefore not married to two sisters at the same time.

On b. Avodah Zarah 4b-5a, R. Shimon ben Yohai claims that David committed adultery with Bathsheba only in order to show the way to penitents, to demonstrate that repentance was possible and effective. On b. Shabbat 56a, R. Yonatan asserts that "All who say, 'David sinned,' are mistaken.... Rather, he wanted to commit [a sin] but did not."

Also on b. Shabbat 56a, Rabbi quotes Nathan's question to David: "Why have you flouted the word of God, doing evil?" (2 Samuel 12:9). Rabbi claims that

This evil is different from all other evils in the Torah. For [regarding] all other evils it is written "and he did," but here it is written "to do," [meaning] that [David] wanted "to do" but did not. "You murdered Uriah the Hittite by the sword," [meaning] that you should have judged him in the Sanhedrin but you did not. "And you took his wife for yourself," [meaning] that your betrothal of her was valid.

According to Rabbi, David only contemplates adultery with Bathsheba; he and Bathsheba are properly betrothed; and he puts to death a man who deserves to die, his only infraction being that he judges Uriah outside of the Sanhedrin.⁶

On b. Makkot 10a, R. Yehoshua ben Levi imagines the following conversation between David and God: “I heard people say, ‘When will that old man [David] die so that Solomon his son can build the Temple and we will ascend [to Jerusalem] for a pilgrimage festival,’ and I was happy.” God responds: “One day that you spend studying Torah is better to me than one thousand whole offerings that your son Solomon will offer to me on the altar.”⁷

Along these same lines, R. Abba bar Kahana, a Palestinian Amora,⁸ depicts a symbiotic relationship between David and Joab on b. Sanhedrin 49a. Joab’s military conquests made it possible for David to study Torah in peace, and David’s merit as a Torah scholar made possible Joab’s military successes. Elsewhere, on b. Moed Katan 16b R. Abahu states approvingly that “when [David] sat in a study session, he did not sit on mattresses and pillows but on the ground,” as an expression of his great humility. Many other examples could be cited both from Palestinian compilations and from the Bavli.⁹

Babylonian attitudes

On the other hand, numerous statements by Babylonian Amoraim acknowledge that King David acted in a less than exemplary manner. The ensuing discussion describes several statements by Rav and Rava which acknowledge the reality of David’s sins. Once again other examples could easily be provided.¹⁰

According to Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda on b. Sanhedrin 21a,¹¹ for example, David had four hundred children born to him by captive women. All four hundred wore their hair after the fashion of idolaters, sat in carriages of gold, led columns of troops, and were David’s strongmen. Most likely, Rav shares the view of Sifra Aharei Mot 13:9 that it is forbidden to wear one’s hair after the fashion of idolaters, and disapproves of David and his children.¹²

On b. Sanhedrin 95a, Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda depicts David as a sinner.

“And Ishbi-benov tried to kill David—He was a descendant of the Raphah” (2 Samuel 21:16).

What is meant by “And Ishbi-benov?”

Said Rav Yehuda said Rav, “A man [*ish*] who came [*ba*] on account of Nov. For the Holy One, blessed be He, had said to David, ‘How long will this crime go unpunished? Because of you, Nov, the city of priests, was massacred. Because of you, Doeg the Edomite was banished. Because of you, Saul and his three sons were killed. Would you rather your line to end or be handed over to the enemy?’” [David] said to Him, “Lord of the world, I would rather be handed over to the enemy than that my line should end.”

The story continues, describing David's imprisonment and miraculous escape; its importance for my purposes is its frank admission that David sinned.

On b. Sanhedrin 107a, Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda asserts, "A person should never cause himself to be tested, for David the king of Israel caused himself to be tested and he failed." David complains about not being mentioned in the Amidah, the daily statutory prayer, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God explains that unlike David, the three patriarchs passed tests and thus merit special honor. God eventually agrees to test David, even informing him in advance that the test will involve forbidden sexual relations, but David fails when he commits adultery with Bathsheba.

Another statement by Rav portrays David as unable to interpret scripture properly, leading to Absalom's rebellion. On b. Sanhedrin 107a, Hushai the Archite asks why the king married a non-Israelite prisoner of war. David explains that the Torah permits such a marriage, but Hushai responds that a correct reading of scripture reveals that anyone who marries a captive woman ends up fathering a rebellious son.

On b. Shabbat 30a, Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda asserts that David asks God to forgive him his crime of adultery.¹³ God grants his request, which prompts the king to ask God to publicize His forgiveness during David's lifetime. God refuses, saying, "During your lifetime I will not make it known. During the lifetime of Solomon your son I will make it known." Once again, Rav acknowledges David's sin, a sin so grievous that God can publicly forgive it only after David's death, in response to Solomon's prayer.¹⁴

On b. Shabbat 56a, Rav casts doubt on the Palestinian patriarch's defense of David by implying that Rabbi's words are motivated by family loyalty. Rabbi whitewashes David's sin of adultery and his role in Uriah's death (see above), prompting Rav to note that Rabbi, "who comes from [the family of] David, bends over backward in his defense."¹⁵

Also on b. Shabbat 56a, Rav asserts that "When you examine David, you find only [the sin] of Uriah, as it is written, 'For David had done what was pleasing to the Lord and never turned throughout his life from all that He had commanded him, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite'" (1 Kings 15:5). It is difficult to reconcile Rav's statement here with statements attributed to him elsewhere which maintain the reality of David's other sins.¹⁶ Perhaps Rav speaks hyperbolically here, as a homileticist attempting to drive home a point with particular force.¹⁷ Or perhaps we have a different version of Rav's view from that preserved in statements transmitted by Rav Yehuda. In either case, Rav maintains the reality of David's sin and makes no attempt to interpret it out of existence.

On b. Shabbat 56b, Rav, quoted by Rav Yehuda, states that God punished David for ruling that Mephiboshet's property should be divided with Ziba, Saul's servant.¹⁸ David's punishment, the division of Israel into northern

and southern kingdoms, is the direct result of David's ill-chosen words and his acceptance of Ziba's slander of Mephiboshet. Also on Shabbat 56b, Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda adds that David's acceptance of Ziba's gossip results in Israel's worship of idols and subsequent exile from her land.

On b. Sanhedrin 93b, we find the following text:

One of the attendants spoke up, "I have observed a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilled in music; he is a brave man and a warrior, sensible in speech and handsome in appearance, and God is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18).

And said Rav Yehuda said Rav, "This entire verse was evil gossip uttered by Doeg. 'Skilled in music,' —he knows how to ask questions. 'A brave man,' —he knows how to respond. 'A warrior,' —he knows how to engage in give and take in the war of Torah. 'Handsome in appearance,' —he knows how to give attractive reasons for his halakhic opinions. 'Sensible in speech,' —he understands how to learn one thing from another. 'God is with him,' —the halakhah is in accordance with his view in every case.

[Saul] said to them, 'My son Jonathan is like him.'

When he said to him, 'And God is with him,' something that [Jonathan] did not have, he became sad and was jealous of him...."

Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda, in other words, transforms what is in scripture an extremely complimentary reference to David into evil gossip designed to arouse Saul's jealousy.

Rav, therefore, usually as quoted by Rav Yehuda, makes no attempt to whitewash David's sins or to square his conduct with rabbinic halakhah. In addition, Rav maintains the reality of David's sins even while asserting that David was truly repentant.

Turning now to statements attributed to a later Babylonian Amora, on b. Sanhedrin 107a Rava invents David's prayer for forgiveness for "that sin," that is, the sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Also on b. Sanhedrin 107a, Rava invents David's complaint to God about contemporaries who ask him what punishment is meted out to a man who has sexual relations with a married woman. David answers that an adulterer is put to death by strangulation but has a portion in the world to come, while one who publicly embarrasses his fellow has no share in the world to come. Rava portrays David as a wise teacher who sees through his contemporaries' attempt to embarrass him and puts them in their place. He imparts important insight about proper halakhic priorities and is truly ashamed of his adultery with Bathsheba.¹⁹

Finally, on b. Sotah 35a Rava depicts David as a sinner who is punished by God for referring to words of Torah as a mere song. God punishes David by making him ignorant of a basic halakhic point that "even schoolchildren

know,” inducing David to have the holy ark carried on a cart rather than transported by priests, thereby causing the death of Uzzah.

Like Rav, therefore, Rava portrays David as a repentant sinner, or asserts that David sinned and allows the matter to end there. As noted above, other examples of this Babylonian tendency could easily be provided.

Accounting for the evidence: Babylonian detachment versus Palestinian engagement

Why do Palestinian rabbis tend to depict David favorably, as a sage who feared God and did not commit the sins which the Bible claims he committed, while Babylonian rabbis tend to acknowledge the reality of David’s sins? I will argue that the difference is due in part to Palestinian rabbinic engagement with non-rabbinic Jews versus the Babylonian rabbinic tendency to keep their distance; and to Palestinian rabbinic weakness in society and the greater strength of Babylonian rabbis. The conclusions of previous chapters, in other words, enable us to explain differences between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic treatment of King David.

First, however, I will argue against a political reading of the Palestinian evidence, that is, a reading which views statements by Palestinian rabbis as reflecting their opinions about the patriarch in Israel and the exilarch in Babylonia, both of whom claimed Davidic descent.²⁰ According to this explanation, Palestinian rabbis approve of the patriarch and express this approval through positive portrayals of David. Alternatively, it could be that Palestinian rabbis fear the patriarch, political head of the Jewish people and liaison between Rome and the Jews, who had at his disposal police power which he readily used against his enemies. Many Talmudic stories describe rabbinic clashes with the patriarch and portray him reacting to rabbinic criticism with harsh reprisals. According to this explanation, Palestinian rabbinic unwillingness to criticize David reflects the fact that the patriarch would have taken umbrage at disrespect shown toward his illustrious ancestor.²¹

Likewise, according to a political explanation, Babylonian rabbis view the exilarch and/or the patriarch as subject to reproof when he goes astray, as a model penitent rather than a powerful monarch who by might and intimidation imposes his will on the Jewish people. Like Palestinian rabbis, Babylonian sages express their opinion about the patriarch or the exilarch through statements about his biblical progenitor, King David.

According to this explanation, Babylonian sages depict David as (1) a model of repentance, (2) a sinner who is swiftly and harshly punished by God, and (3) occasionally as a great man and legitimate ruler of the Israelites.²² Babylonian portrayals of King David indicate the conviction that the patriarch and the exilarch should be models of piety who deserve commendation when they act properly and condemnation when they transgress.

This explanation does not make sense as far as Palestinian rabbis are concerned, however, because Palestinian rabbis routinely criticize the patriarch²³ and yet they tend to portray David as a one-dimensional saint. And when they do admit that David sinned, they tend to attribute to him only minor offences. Why is overt Palestinian rabbinic criticism of David rare, but explicit Palestinian criticism of the patriarch relatively common? How could Palestinian rabbis defy the patriarch, telling stories in which they lambast him on account of his moral and intellectual failings, but whitewash David's sins out of respect and fear of the patriarch? Why would they record direct assaults against the patriarch, but be less willing to record indirect assaults? Most likely, therefore, Palestinian rabbinic portrayals of David are not in fact veiled attempts at expressing opinions about the patriarch.

This argument does not challenge a political reading of the Babylonian rabbinic statements surveyed above. In other words, Babylonian rabbis very likely do comment at times on the patriarch in Israel and/or the exilarch in Babylonia through their statements about David, in spite of the unlikelihood that Palestinian rabbis are doing likewise. There exists a striking correspondence between Babylonian rabbinic treatment of King David on the one hand and their treatment of the exilarch on the other. Babylonian sources criticize the exilarch indirectly, through criticism of his "house" and his "servants," but never through direct criticism of the exilarch himself.²⁴ Babylonian criticism of King David is therefore sometimes indirect criticism of the exilarch, who is too sensitive and too powerful to be openly attacked.

Furthermore, many of the Babylonian criticisms of David are attributed to Rav. A story on *y. Baba Batra* 5:5 (15a—b) depicts tension between Rav and the exilarch. According to this story, the exilarch appoints Rav as market inspector, but jails him when he is unhappy with the way Rav carries out his duties. If the attributions are to be trusted, then Rav's criticisms of David probably express his attitude toward the exilarch.

In addition, two stories depict tension between Rav and the patriarch. Rav's statements about David, therefore, may also express his attitudes toward the Palestinian patriarch. It will be recalled that Rav does not simply criticize David; he also portrays him as a sincere penitent who acknowledges his sins and expresses the sincere desire to do better. He is even once quoted as saying, "The world was created only for [the sake of] David."²⁵ Rav's relationship with Rabbi as recorded in the sources is likewise not one of simple antagonism. On the one hand, Rav is Rabbi's student, and according to *b. Sanhedrin* 98b Rav once declares, "If [the messiah] is among the living, he is Our Holy Master [=Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi]."²⁶ On the other hand, according to *b. Sanhedrin* 5a Rabbi refuses to grant to Rav a rabbinic prerogative, conferring it instead upon Rav's relatively obscure cousin, Rabbah bar Hana. In addition, according to *b. Shabbat* 56a Rav reacts negatively to Yehuda the patriarch's attempt to whitewash one of David's

sins, asserting that “Rabbi, who descends from David, bends over backwards to explain [David’s] actions in a positive light” (see above). Very likely, therefore, early Babylonian comments about David are veiled references to his descendant, the patriarch.

ATTITUDES TOWARD KING DAVID AND RABBINIC ROLES IN SOCIETY

Returning now to Palestinian rabbinic comments about David, how do we account for the fact that Palestinian sages portray David as a saint if we reject the political explanation? Our conclusions in previous chapters regarding relationships between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis provide a key. Palestinian rabbis, closely involved with non-rabbis and seeking to solidify their position in society, respond to or anticipate the scorn of non-rabbinic Jews, who confront or could conceivably confront the rabbis with embarrassing facts about David’s life.

We observed in Part One of this book that Palestinian rabbis tended to interact with non-rabbinic Jews, and frequently appealed to them for support or social advancement. David either inspired ridicule, or Palestinian rabbis feared that he would do so, since he was important to them as the ancestor of the patriarch and the messiah and yet the biblical account of his life makes his moral blemishes painfully obvious. Because of their outward-looking orientation, their relatively strong links to and dependence upon non-rabbinic Jews, Palestinian sages were concerned about their opinions and did what they could to explain away David’s embarrassing moral lapses.

Interestingly, m. Megillah 4:10 rules that “the story of David...is neither read [as part of the public Torah reading] nor translated [into Aramaic, in a language the people could understand].”²⁷ T. Megillah 3:38 preserves a similar ruling, specifying, however, that the story of David “and Bathsheba” is not to be publicly read or translated. These rabbinic rulings reveal the concern of Palestinian rabbis that non-rabbinic Jews remain ignorant about David’s worst sins. This concern very likely persisted into the post-Talmudic era, as shown by the fact that Massekhet Soferim 9:9, considered by most scholars to derive from post-Talmudic Palestine, also prohibits the public reading and translating of the story of David and Bathsheba.²⁸

It bears reiterating that our conclusions do not depend on the existence of actual face-to-face conflict between rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews regarding the character of King David. For our purposes, it is enough that rabbis anticipated such conflict and felt the need to respond because of their sensitivity to non-rabbinic opinion. Palestinian rabbis frequently interact with non-rabbis and are therefore attentive to what they might say or think. Some of their statements are formulated at least in part with non-rabbis as the anticipated audience for their remarks.²⁹

Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, distanced themselves from non-rabbinic Jews and occupied a relatively strong position in society. They therefore lacked a powerful stimulus motivating them to whitewash David's sins.

Examination of rabbinic comments about Moses adds perspective to the discussion above.³⁰ More frequently than is the case with King David, Palestinian rabbis tell stories in which Moses sins, looks bad, is diminished, or his uniqueness and special status as heroic leader of Israel is deemphasized. There is not the same sustained attempt to whitewash Moses' sins or to "reinterpret" actions by him which run counter to rabbinic values. In fact, Palestinian rabbis sometimes invent criticisms of Moses which are absent from or at best tenuously connected to the biblical account. In addition, the sins they attribute to Moses tend to be more serious than those they attribute to David.

On b. Sotah 13b, for example, R.Yonatan asserts that Moses was no longer wise when he got old and was unable to study Torah. Similarly, on b. Berakhot 63b R.Abahu claims that after Moses removes the Tent of Meeting from the Israelite encampment God orders him to return it to the camp, threatening to appoint Joshua in his place if he fails to do so.³¹ On b. Pesahim 61b, Resh Lakish cites Moses as an example of a sage who loses his wisdom when he gets angry. On b. Nedarim 32a, R.Yehuda bar Bizna says that Moses was derelict about performing the commandment of circumcision,³² and as a result was swallowed up to his feet by demonic beings. Only his wife's swift action saved him from death. Similarly, on b. Nedarim 31b R.Yehoshua ben Korha asserts that Moses is guilty of the serious sin of neglecting to circumcise his son.³³ On b. Berakhot 32a, R.Elazar claims that Moses cast aspersions on God, using a term which implies disrespect and undue harshness on Moses' part.³⁴ On b. Berakhot 55a, R.Yonatan claims that Moses garbled God's instructions for constructing the Tabernacle, and needed Bezalel to set him straight.³⁵

Along these same lines, on b. Taanit 30b R.Yohanan claims that God stopped speaking to Moses after the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, and only resumed when the last Israelite worshipper had died. Moses' relationship with God, in other words, depends on the merit of the people.³⁶

On b. Berakhot 7a, a Tanna in the name of R.Yehoshua ben Korha asserts that when God refused to let Moses see His face, He said disapprovingly, "When I wanted, you didn't. Now that you want, I don't." On b. Sanhedrin 94a, a Tanna in the name of R.Papias says that it was shameful that Jethro, Moses' Midianite father-in-law, said "Blessed is God" before Moses addressed God in this fashion.

According to R.Hanina or R.Yoshaya on b. Sanhedrin 8a, Moses is punished for speaking as if he were the source of law.³⁷ On b. Sanhedrin 111a, R.Elazar son of R.Yosi asserts that Moses addressed the following complaint to God: "From the moment I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name he has done evil to this people" (Exodus 5:23). God punishes Moses

and replies indignantly that the patriarchs neither asked to know God's name nor doubted His power, while Moses did both.³⁸ And, according to a Tannaitic statement on b. Sotah 36b–37a, God scolds Moses for praying long at the Sea of Reeds while His beloved Israelites are about to be overtaken by Pharaoh's army. Other examples, from both Palestinian and Babylonian compilations, could be provided.³⁹

Criticism of Moses' behavior by Palestinian rabbis, therefore, is in marked contrast to their treatment of King David, whom they tend to describe as a saint. Why should this be the case? Undoubtedly, Palestinian rabbis sometimes criticize Moses to drive home an ethical point with particular force (e.g., if even Moses succumbs to sin, certainly ordinary mortals are in danger of doing so), but why do they tend not to use David in similar fashion?

In addition, if I am correct that Palestinian rabbis tend to portray David as sinless in response to or in anticipation of the criticism or scorn of non-rabbinic Jews, then why do they sometimes portray Moses as a sinner? Why should there be a difference between Palestinian rabbinic treatment of David and Moses if the issue is (anticipated) non-rabbinic Jewish reaction?

Very likely, the answer lies in the greatness of the biblical Moses versus the much more problematic biblical character of David. The very strength of Moses' character in the Bible freed the rabbis to depict him as a sinner and thereby teach moral lessons, demonstrate theological truths, and score polemical points without exposing themselves or Moses himself to ridicule by non-rabbis. Palestinian rabbis, secure in the knowledge that Moses was a respected figure for most non-rabbinic Jews (perhaps *too* respected a figure — see below), could exploit his weaknesses or even invent new ones without fear of damaging his reputation, or their own for that matter.

King David's reputation, however, was less secure. From the perspective of a post-biblical age David is often much less than a hero. Palestinian rabbis, sensitive to or anticipating the criticism or scorn of non-rabbinic Jews, depict David as a true saint. They do so by downplaying his embarrassing weaknesses and smoothing over his egregious sins. How could God tolerate David's behavior and permit the monarchy to remain in his hands and in the hands of his heirs, the patriarchs? Palestinian rabbis answer by "reinterpreting" David's story and claiming that those who insist he was a sinner misunderstand the Bible.

Perhaps it will be suggested that we need not posit rabbinic sensitivity to or anticipation of *non-rabbinic* Jewish reaction to explain the difference between Palestinian rabbinic comments about David and those about Moses. Perhaps we are dealing with an entirely rabbinic affair, with Palestinian rabbis (1) portraying Moses as less than a saint so *rabbis* do not treat him as a divine figure, and (2) portraying David as a saint because of the danger that *rabbis* would not view him with sufficient respect.

This explanation fails, however, to explain the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian portrayals of David. It fails to explain why

Palestinian rabbis should be acutely concerned about rabbinic reaction to the morally ambiguous character of King David, while Babylonian rabbis are not. Why do Palestinian rabbis avoid portraying David as anything other than a saint out of concern that their fellow rabbis will draw the wrong conclusions, while Babylonian rabbis do not? If we posit rabbinic sensitivity to non-rabbinic Jewish reaction, however, then we can explain the difference between Palestine and Babylonia.

For the same reason, we cannot explain the tendency of Palestinian rabbis to portray David as a saint as due solely to their belief that David was the progenitor of the messiah. According to this explanation, we have difficulty accounting for the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic commentary. Why are Palestinian rabbis anxious to portray David, and through David the messiah, as an unblemished saint, while Babylonian rabbis are not? According to the explanation suggested above, however, we easily understand the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis.

The willingness of Palestinian rabbis to criticize Moses, in fact, may have been in part a reaction to portrayals of him as a saint, as semi-divine or even divine.⁴⁰ Samaritan glorification of Moses is well documented, as is the pagan fondness for narrating the lives of divine men and the Christian tendency to portray Jesus Christ as a second Moses, to emphasize the commonalities between the first and second redeemers. All of these factors may have induced rabbis to depict Moses as a fallible man, to emphasize his shortcomings as well as his virtues, and occasionally to criticize his behavior.⁴¹ According to this explanation as well, Palestinian rabbis are responsive to the opinions of non-rabbinic Jews and Babylonian rabbis are not.

It will be recalled that in the discussion above, I explained Babylonian rabbinic reluctance to criticize the exilarch directly as due in part to rabbinic fear of exilarchic reprisals. This explanation, however, should not be understood as implying that the exilarch or the members of his bureaucracy read the developing Talmud. With a few possible exceptions, it is extremely unlikely that the exilarch and his staff had the slightest interest in what the rabbis said or studied in the privacy of their own schools.

Rather, Talmudic stories about the exilarch, before their inclusion in the developing Talmud, apparently circulated in a public forum accessible to the exilarch and his bureaucracy, which explains the concern of these stories to avoid explicit insults to the exilarch. This concern was not lost when the stories took up residence in their present contexts in the Talmud.

It should also be emphasized that it is highly unlikely that non-rabbis studied the Talmuds in search of the few statements addressed specifically to them. Rather, these statements originated in a public forum in which Palestinian rabbis addressed their comments to non-rabbinic Jews. An important feature of the content of these statements was not lost when the statements were incorporated into the Talmud.

MOSES

This chapter continues the examination of rabbinic scriptural commentary concerning Moses begun in the previous chapter, and attempts to support this thesis further.

We attempt to show that (1) Palestinian rabbis argue against the notion that the Torah is of human rather than divine origin, while Babylonian rabbis do not, and (2) Palestinian rabbis emphasize Moses' role in the salvation of Israel and deemphasize his role as Israel's prosecutor, while Babylonian rabbis do not. These differences, we argue, are explicable as reflections of the self-isolation of Babylonian rabbis and the greater involvement of Palestinian sages with non-rabbinic Jews: Palestinian rabbis are sensitive to the possibility that non-rabbinic Jews might fall prey to heretical ideas; Babylonian rabbis, aloof from non-rabbis, tend to be oblivious to such concerns.

“THE TORAH OF MOSES” AND THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE

Babylonian Amoraim and the “Torah of Moses”

We find, first, that our sources seldom refer to the Torah as belonging to Moses (for example, in the phrase “the Torah of Moses”),¹ except when Babylonian rabbis are involved in the discussion. On b. Yevamot 39b, for example, Rav Hiyya bar Avya, a Babylonian Amora, asserts that a document of *halizah* (by which a widow releases her deceased husband's brother from his obligation to marry her) concludes as follows: “And we [the presiding judges] read to [the litigants] what is written in the book of the Torah of Moses.” Elsewhere, on b. Yoma 71b, Rav Hisda, also a Babylonian Amora, states that we do not learn a particular law from “the Torah of Moses.”²

According to b. Yoma 36b, “a certain man” who is leading prayers in the presence of Rabbah also uses the term. Rabbah questions the man's use of R. Meir's prayer formula in preference to a formula attributed to the majority of sages. The man responds that he agrees with the view of R. Meir, “as it is

written in the book of the Torah of Moses.” The “certain man” is very likely a rabbi or a rabbinical student, indicated by his familiarity with a rabbinic text, so here as well the phrase in question is attributed to a Babylonian scholar.³

Finally, in a Tannaitic statement on b. Baba Mezia 75b, R.Shimon says that Jews who lend money and demand interest render “Moses and his Torah” untruthful.⁴

Three of the four statements cited in the brief survey above, therefore, are attributed to Babylonian Amoraim and all four are in the Bavli. While we should be hesitant to draw far-reaching conclusions on the basis of a small number of statements, the prominence of Babylonian Amoraim is striking since the overwhelming majority of rabbinic statements about Moses are attributed to Palestinian rabbis. The significance of these facts will be explored below.

Non-rabbis and non-Jews

Elsewhere in the two Talmuds, phrases such as “the Torah of Moses” are found only in statements attributed to non-rabbis or non-Jews. On b. Megillah 9a, for example, the Egyptian king Ptolemy makes reference to the “Torah of Moses your master.” Similarly, Rabbah bar bar Hana quotes Koran and his followers, buried in Gehenna under the Sinai desert, saying that “Moses and his Torah are truthful” and “we are liars.” On b. Sanhedrin 91a Geviha ben Pasisa tells the sages that he wishes to debate with Africans, Egyptians, and Ishmaelites in the presence of Alexander the Great. If he defeats them in argument, says Geviha, the sages should tell the non-Jews that “the Torah of Moses defeated you.”

On y. Yoma 3:7 (40d) the sages relate the high priest’s confession on the Day of Atonement, concluding with a citation from scripture introduced by the phrase “as it is written in the Torah of Moses your servant.” On y. Sanhedrin 10:2 (28d)⁵ an idolatrous prostitute consents to have sex with a Jew if he renounces “the Torah of Moses,” and the same phrase is used in a parallel source on b. Sanhedrin 106a. Y.Sanhedrin 10:2 (28b) depicts Ahab scoffing at “the Torah of Moses,” and b. Shabbat 116a—b quotes the reference of a Christian judge to “the Torah of Moses.”

Rabbinic sources in this instance reflect actual usage in non-rabbinic literature, since non-rabbis and non-Jews⁶ routinely refer to the Torah as “the Torah of Moses.”⁷ Palestinian rabbis, however, avoid the phrase when speaking in their own names, probably because it implies that the Torah was composed by humans rather than by God. By avoiding this phrase, Palestinian rabbis anticipate or respond to anti-rabbinic polemic by Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics, and/or the scorn of non-rabbinic Jews.

The Palestinian “Torah of Moses”

On b. Shabbat 89a, R. Yehoshua ben Levi quotes scripture’s use of the phrase “the Torah of Moses,” but states clearly that it does not imply Moses’ authorship of the Torah. Yehoshua ben Levi describes Satan coming before God and asking where he can find the Torah. God tells him that “I gave it to the world,” and instructs Satan to “go to Ben Amram.” Satan asks Moses, “Where is the Torah which God gave to you?”, and Moses responds, “Who am I that God should give me the Torah?” God exclaims, “Moses! Are you a liar?”, whereupon Moses answers that the Torah is God’s precious possession which He delights in daily; how can he, Moses, mere flesh and blood, boast about having it in his possession? God rewards Moses for his humility, informing him that “Since you have belittled yourself, the Torah shall be referred to by your name, as it is said, ‘Remember the Torah of Moses My servant’” (Malakhi 3:22).⁸

This story, told by a Palestinian Amora, uses the biblical phrase “the Torah of Moses,” but empties it of potentially threatening connotations. Only because Moses demonstrates his humility and advances no claim of authorship or possession can the prophet Moses refer to the Torah as belonging to him.

Moshe Weinfeld’s observation that “as is well known, the author of the *Temple Scroll* changed the words of God in the book of *Deuteronomy* from the third person to first person,” is relevant in this context.⁹ “As Y. Yadin already noted,” Weinfeld comments, “by this change the author wanted to make clear that the Torah of *Deuteronomy* was delivered as the direct speech of God and not paraphrased by Moses, as it appears in the canonical book of *Deuteronomy*.”¹⁰ Weinfeld goes on,

The same sensitivity is felt in Rabbinic sources and in the Targums and hence the repeated statements concerning *Deuteronomy*: “I (Moses) do not speak on my own authority but on God’s authority.” In the verse in *Deut.* 1, 6: “Yhwh our God spoke to us in Horeb as follows” *Midrash Sifrei* adds: “he said to them: I do not speak on my own but from the mouth of the Holy One I speak to you”...(*Sifrei* sec. 5). Further, whenever we find Moses saying... “I said to you” *Midrash Sifrei* explains: “I don’t speak on my own etc.” (Sections 9, 19, 25). *Pseudo-Jonathan* follows this system and adds to *Deut.* 1, 6 (*Ha-shem Eloheinu Dibber Elenu ba-Horev* [“The Lord our God spoke to us at Horev”])... “and not I by myself.”¹¹

If our interpretation is correct, rabbinic avoidance of the phrase “The Torah of Moses” reflects concern for the same issue.¹²

The Torah from heaven

Consistent with their avoidance of this phrase because of its potentially heretical significance, is Palestinian rabbis' emphasis on the divine nature of the Torah and its precepts.¹³ M. Sanhedrin 10:1, for example, asserts, "These have no part in the world to come: One who says there is no resurrection of the dead and no Torah from heaven."¹⁴ According to Tannaitic sources on b. Sanhedrin 99a, the verse, "For he despised the word of God" refers to "one who says the Torah is not from heaven. And even if he says that the whole Torah is from heaven except for one verse which the Holy One Blessed be He did not say but which Moses made up, this [is what is meant by the verse] 'For he despised the word of God.'"¹⁵ Sifrei Devarim 357¹⁶ and b. Baba Batra 15a contain Tannaitic sources which assert that God dictated the entire Torah and Moses copied it, including the verses which describe Moses' death.

B. Baba Kamma 38a–b likewise emphasizes the divine origin of the Torah's details. Ulla cites Deuteronomy 2:9, "Do not harass Moab or engage them in war," and objects that the verse implies that Moses contemplated an attack on Moab without explicit instructions from God. Obviously this is impossible, thinks Ulla, and he explains that Moses interpreted scripture. Since the Torah commands Israel to wage war on the Midianites because they assisted the Moabites, reasons Moses, certainly Israel should wage war on Moab itself. Moses acts on the basis of his understanding of God's will as revealed through scripture and not on the basis of his own independent initiative.¹⁷ In addition, according to b. Sanhedrin 8a¹⁸ either R. Hanina or R. Yoshaya claims that Moses is punished for implying that he rather than God is the source of laws.¹⁹

The Babylonian Moses

Turning briefly to Babylonian Amoraim, on b. Sotah 35a Rabbah, a third-generation Babylonian Amora, claims that Caleb said to the Israelites, "[Moses] brought us out of Egypt, split for us the sea, and fed us manna." Rabbah is certainly not claiming here that Moses rather than God performed these wondrous deeds. Such an understanding contradicts everything we know about rabbinic theology. The very fact, however, that the Babylonian Amora emphasizes Moses' role without mentioning God is extraordinary.

Similarly, on b. Makkot 23b–24a Rav Hamnuna cites Deut. 33:4: "Moses commanded to us Torah," and explains that the word "Torah" is numerologically equivalent to 611. If we add to this number the first two of the ten commandments, which the Israelites heard directly from God, we arrive at 613, the total number of commandments. Once again the Babylonian Amora is not concerned with the possibly heretical implications of the biblical verse, and makes no attempt to explain it away.

Babylonian rabbis are evidently less concerned with emphasizing the divine nature of the Torah and its precepts, less concerned with countering the view that the Torah is of human origin, than are their Palestinian counterparts.²⁰ Palestinian rabbis, but not Babylonian rabbis, worry that non-rabbinic Jews might draw the wrong conclusions about the divine nature of scripture. Why is this a concern in Palestine but not in Babylonia?

Probably, the answer is to be found in the closer involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbinic Jews and the relative isolation of their Babylonian counterparts. Palestinian rabbis try not to imply the Bible's human authorship, in order not to lead their (potential?) Jewish audience astray. Babylonian rabbis are less concerned with this issue because they tend to distance themselves from non-rabbinic Jews. These factors would have led to Palestinian rabbinic reaction to, or anticipation of, the effect of their teachings on non-rabbinic Jews and relative Babylonian rabbinic neglect of the issue.

Once again we cannot view the matter as a strictly rabbinic affair, with rabbis worried that other rabbis will draw faulty conclusions about the Torah. As noted in the previous chapter, such an explanation fails to account for the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis on this subject. It also fails to explain why Palestinians seem to be concerned with the opinions of their fellow rabbis but Babylonians do not. By introducing non-rabbis into the picture, the distinction between Palestine and Babylonia becomes understandable.

Once again we do not need to posit face-to-face confrontations between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews on the particular issues discussed above to explain the difference between Palestine and Babylonia. The general involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbinic Jews suffices to explain rabbinic concern for a heretical point of view to which non-rabbinic Jews might fall prey.

MOSES, SAVIOR OF THE ISRAELITE PEOPLE

Our conclusions regarding relations between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews help to explain another feature of rabbinic commentary about Moses. This is the tendency of Palestinian rabbis to focus on the salvational aspects of Moses' activity and to ignore the stormy periods of his relationship with the Israelites. The following discussion argues that this aspect of Palestinian rabbinic Bible commentary is also attributable to the relatively close involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis. This close involvement increased their awareness of the possibly negative affects which problematic biblical passages might have on non-rabbinic Jews.

The Moses of the Palestinian rabbis frequently prays effectively on behalf of the people,²¹ on behalf of individuals,²² and on his own behalf, as an expression of personal piety or devotion to God.²³ He often brings blessings upon the Israelites, redeems and defends them, rescues them from danger, and gives them advice on how to achieve a close relationship with God.²⁴

Babylonian rabbinic commentary about Moses, particularly prior to the fourth Amoraic generation, only rarely bears on such matters. It may be significant that Babylonian rabbinic emphasis on Moses the savior is greater during the later Amoraic period than during the earlier, perhaps once again in response to Palestinian models. The small number of relevant cases, however, makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions.²⁵

The Palestinian Moses is virtually never the pentateuchal Moses who swiftly and mercilessly carries out or announces God's punishment and whose interactions with the Israelites sometimes end in the death of thousands.²⁶ And when the Palestinian rabbinic Moses does express anger toward the Israelites, the problem which gives rise to his anger is quickly resolved without punishment of the people,²⁷ or Moses himself is punished or threatened with punishment for losing his temper.²⁸

On b. Berakhot 63b, for example, R.Abahu claims that God, responding to Moses' removal of the tabernacle outside the camp, threatens to appoint Joshua in Moses' place if he refuses to return the tabernacle to the Israelite encampment. Another source on b. Berakhot 63b also mentions Moses' removal of the tabernacle outside the camp. The biblical story (Exodus 32:1– 33:11) emphasizes the punitive nature of Moses' action, with Moses distancing the divine presence from the Israelite camp, which is no longer fit to serve as the dwelling place of God on earth. The Palestinian rabbinic story, in contrast, has a different emphasis altogether, making the point that the Israelites who trekked out to the tabernacle are praiseworthy as "God-seekers," just like students of Torah in the present who travel from place to place to hear words of Torah.²⁹

How do we account for this Palestinian focus on one aspect of Moses' role? As noted above, the answer is to be found in the unique relationship between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbinic Jews. By means of their portrayal of Moses the savior and their suppression of Moses the agent of the people's destruction, Palestinian rabbis rehabilitate the biblical Moses in the area of his greatest vulnerability to criticism. Palestinian rabbis, who, as noted in the previous chapter, were in general not bashful about criticizing Moses, respond to or anticipate adverse reactions from non-rabbinic Jews to the most appalling aspect of Moses' behavior as seen from the perspective of post-biblical generations. Palestinian rabbis accomplish this by deemphasizing the biblical record of bloody confrontations between Moses and the Israelites.

Palestinian rabbis also rehabilitate the image of biblical Israelites and respond to or anticipate adverse reactions by non-rabbinic Jews to the Bible's often negative portrayal of the Israelites. Palestinian rabbis accomplish this by deemphasizing the biblical record of Israelite rebellion and punishment and by depicting an Israelite people beloved by God and defended by a great and compassionate leader.³⁰

AHITOFEL

Like the previous two chapters, this chapter claims that the theory of differing relationships between rabbis and non-rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia helps explain significant aspects of rabbinic Bible commentary. We analyze statements about Ahitofel, King David's adviser, and argue that Palestinian rabbis depict him positively because of their greater involvement with non-rabbinic Jews, and their relatively weak position in society. Palestinian rabbis view Ahitofel as a rabbinic sage, and worry that if they depict Ahitofel unfavorably they might diminish the stature of all rabbis in the eyes of non-rabbinic Jews. Palestinian rabbis worry that non-rabbinic Jews might reason as follows: "If knowledge of Torah is compatible with condemnation by God, then what is so special about the rabbis? Why should rabbis be given special respect or be counted among the leaders of society?"

Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, tend to be sharply critical of Ahitofel. Due to their greater aloofness, the existence of a wicked biblical "rabbi" is less of a personal threat to them. Ahitofel's wickedness is more of an internal rabbinic affair than a source of embarrassment to them vis-à-vis the outside world.¹

Ahitofel, it will be recalled, was David's trusted adviser who betrayed the king and joined the rebellion of Absalom, David's son. Ahitofel advises Absalom to have intercourse with his father's concubines so that "when all Israel hears that you have dared the wrath of your father, all who support you will be encouraged" (2 Samuel 16:21). Ahitofel also advises Absalom: "Let me pick twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. I will come upon him when he is weary and disheartened and I will throw him into a panic; and when all the troops with him flee I will kill the king alone" (2 Samuel 17:1–2). 2 Samuel 17:23 describes his unfortunate end: "When Ahitofel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and went home to his native town. He set his affairs in order, and then he hanged himself."

POST-TANNAITIC PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES
TOWARD AHITOFEL

Turning first to post-Tannaitic Palestinian sources, y. Berakhot 4:4 (8a) contains a series of Amoraic comments based on the mishnah's statement that "One who makes his prayer fixed, his prayer is not supplication." The Yerushalmi's discussion is as follows:

Said R.Elazar, "Provided that he not be like one who reads a letter."
R.Aha in the name of R.Yosi,² "He needs to innovate something every day."
Ahitofel prayed three new prayers every day.
Said R.Zeira, "Every time I did this I erred."

According to this source, therefore, Ahitofel conforms to the rabbinic ideal while R.Zeira, a prominent Palestinian sage, does not.

R.Samuel bar Yizhak's statement on y. Sanhedrin 10:2 (29a–b) likewise attests to a positive attitude toward Ahitofel in Palestinian Amoraic sources. According to this statement, Samuel hands over to David a scroll which Ahitofel, inspired by the holy spirit, had recited to him. The source continues:

And what would Ahitofel do?
When someone came to him for advice, he would say to him, "Go and do thus and such, and if you don't believe me, go and consult the Urim and Tumim [the priestly oracles]."
And the person would go and consult and find it to be so.
And this accords with what is written [in scripture], "In those days, the advice which Ahitofel gave when someone asked [a man] was like an oracle of God" (2 Samuel 16:23).³
"A man" is said but not written. Scripture was unable to call him "a man."
How did he become distant?
"And Ahitofel saw that his advice was ignored, so he saddled his donkey, went home, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself" (2 Samuel 17:23). Ahitofel ordered his sons to do three things. He said to them, "Don't rebel against the kingship of David, for we find that the Holy One, blessed be He favors him even in public. And don't negotiate with someone whom fortune is smiling upon. And if the day of Shavuot is clear, sow fine wheat."

This source portrays an Ahitofel who (1) is graced by the holy spirit and dispenses advice confirmed by an oracle, (2) gives sensible advice to

his sons, and (3) is superior to ordinary human beings to the extent that scripture is reluctant to refer to him as a mere mortal. This source is highly favorable to Ahitofel even though it explicitly describes his unfortunate end.

Elsewhere, y. Sanhedrin 10:2 (29a) contains a lengthy account which begins with the unattributed assertion that "Ahitofel was a great Torah scholar." R.Abba bar Kahana asserts that

David appointed ninety thousand elders in one day and did not appoint Ahitofel along with them....

You find that when David came to carry the Ark of the covenant of God, he did not carry it properly...and the Ark repeatedly lifted up the priests and threw them to the ground.

David sent for Ahitofel and said to him, "Please tell me what's wrong with this Ark, which repeatedly lifts up priests and throws them to the ground."

He said to him, "Ask the sages you appointed."

Said David, "Whoever knows how to set it aright and refuses to do so, let his end be by choking."

He said, "Make a sacrifice before [the Ark] and it will stop."⁴

This accords with what is written, "When the bearers of the Ark of the Lord took six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling" (2 Samuel 6:13).

R.Hanina and R.Mena: One said, "After every step an ox and a fatling, and at the end [of the journey] seven bulls and seven rams."

The other said "After every step seven bulls and seven rams, and at the end an ox and a fatling."

Said the Holy One blessed be He to Ahitofel, "Something that children say in school every day you did not say to him: 'But to the Kohatites he did not give any; since theirs was the service of the sacred objects, their portage was by shoulder' (Numbers 7:9), and this you told him?"

A second narrative follows:

And similarly, when David came to dig the foundations of the Temple, he dug fifteen hundred cubits and did not find the [waters of the] deep, until finally he found a pot and wanted to raise it.

[The pot] said to him, "You cannot."

He said to it, "Why?"

It said to him, "Because I am here pressing down on the [waters of the] deep."

He said to it, "How long have you been here?"

It said to him, "When the Merciful One's voice was heard at Sinai:

'I am the Lord your God,' the land trembled and sank and I was placed here pressing down on the [waters of the] deep."

Despite this, [David] did not listen to it. When he lifted it, the [waters of the] deep rose to inundate the world, and Ahitofel stood there. He said, "Now David will be choked and I will rule."

Said David, "Whoever knows how to stop it but does not, let his end be by choking."

[Ahitofel] said what he said and stopped it.

David began to sing a song: "'A song of Ascents' (*Shir Ha-maalot*): A song for one hundred elevations (*Shir le-Meah Olot*).'" For every one hundred cubits he sang a song.

Even so, in the end [Ahitofel] was choked.

Said R.Yosi, 'This accords with the proverb: 'A person must beware the curse of a great man even if it is unmerited.'"

According to the first story cited above, Ahitofel is a sage who is neither a model of righteousness nor of wickedness. He resents not being appointed by David, but his resentment is justified on purely scholarly grounds. When David has a halakhic problem he turns immediately to Ahitofel rather than to any of the ninety thousand sages he recently appointed. When David threatens Ahitofel with choking, he reveals immediately how to control the recalcitrant Ark. God is amazed that Ahitofel revealed a complicated way to control the Ark when a much simpler remedy was stated explicitly in scripture. The force of God's remark is unclear; there is no reason to view it as an expression of extreme divine displeasure.

The second story as well depicts Ahitofel neither as a model of righteousness nor of wickedness. He wishes David were dead and wants to rule in his place, but as in the first story Ahitofel's resistance is short-lived and he saves the world in response to David's threat. In addition, Ahitofel wishes for David's death only after the king endangers the entire world. R.Yosi, finally, claims that Ahitofel's death was unmerited. He died because of the power of the mistaken curse of a great man rather than as deserved punishment for wicked behavior.

Two Palestinian Amoraic traditions in the Bavli are also kindly disposed toward him. B.Sukkah 53a-b quotes the following statement by R. Yohanan:

When David dug the foundations [of the Temple] the [waters of the] deep floated to the top and wanted to inundate the world.

David said, "Does anyone know if it is permissible to write [God's] name on a shard, throw it onto the [waters of the] deep, and leave it lying there?"

No one said anything to him.

David said, "Anyone who knows the answer but doesn't speak up, let him die by choking."

Ahitofel reasoned *a fortiori*, "To make peace between a man and wife, the

Torah says, 'My name which is written in holiness should be dissolved in water.' To make peace in the entire world, how much the more so?"

[Ahitofel] said to him, "Permitted."

He wrote [God's] name on a shard, threw it onto the [waters of the] deep and the waters descended sixteen thousand cubits.

When he saw how much the water had descended, he said, "When it rises more, it will moisten the earth."

He said fifteen [Psalms] of ascent and raised it fifteen thousand cubits and stopped it one thousand cubits [from the surface].

This source depicts Ahitofel as a sage who uses a common rabbinic technique of scriptural interpretation to derive one law from another. The text supplies no motive for his initial lack of response to David's urgent request for advice. Perhaps his silence indicates indifference to the fate of the world or the building of the Temple; perhaps it indicates humility or reluctance to misuse God's name. When Ahitofel finally speaks, he saves the world. The story apparently views him positively; at the very least it contains no explicit criticism.

Along these same lines, according to b. Hagigah 15b R.Ami claims that Doeg and Ahitofel asked three hundred questions about a "tower which flies in the air," the implication being that they were great sages who thought deeply about recondite matters. Once again, the Palestinian Amora emphasizes the scholarly greatness of Ahitofel without any evidence of disapproval.⁵

According to the most harshly critical Palestinian Amoraic statement, attributed to R.Abba bar Kahana on y. Peah 1:1 (16a),

Every one of David's generation was righteous, but because there were informers among them, they would fall in battle. This is what David said: "I am among enflamed ones; I lie down among burning ones' (Psalms 57:5). 'I am among enflamed ones,' this refers to Abner and Amasa who were enflamed with Torah. 'I die on account of the burning ones,' this refers to Doeg and Ahitofel who burned after evil speech."

Other statements and stories surveyed above describe Ahitofel as disloyal to the king, ambitious, insensitive to the fate of the world, and jealous of sages promoted ahead of him. We will see in the discussion below, however, that statements by Babylonians and Tannaim are much more vehemently critical of Ahitofel than are even the most negative post-Tannaitic Palestinian statements (with the possible exception of y. Peah 1:1 (16a)). And we find

no Tannaitic or Babylonian Amoraic parallels to the surprisingly positive opinions about Ahitofel expressed in the statements examined above. The reasons for these chronological and geographical distinctions will be explored below.

BABYLONIAN ATTITUDES

Turning first to statements by Babylonian Amoraim,⁶ on b. Hagigah 15b Samuel and Rav Yehuda discuss the sad fate of Doeg and Ahitofel, great sages on the one hand, yet among the seven people who m. Sanhedrin 10:2 asserts have no portion in the world to come. The thought that scholars could suffer such a sad fate moves Yehuda to tears, but Samuel explains that they were punished because of their “impure hearts,” or “filthy minds.”⁷

According to b. Sanhedrin 106b, R.Ami, a Palestinian Amora, states that Doeg and Ahitofel asked three hundred questions regarding a tower flying in the air, the implication being that the two biblical figures were great sages (see above).⁸ Rava, a Babylonian Amora, is not impressed. He objects, “And is it a great thing to ask questions?...Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written, ‘God sees the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7). Rav Mesharshya, another Babylonian Amora, claims that “Doeg and Ahitofel did not understand rabbinic traditions.” Mar Zutra objects, “People about whom it is written, ‘Where is the one who counts, where is the one who weighs, where is the one who counts the towers?’ (Isaiah 33:18), did not understand rabbinic traditions? Rather, their traditions did not conform to the law, as it is written, ‘The secret of God belongs to those who fear Him’” (Psalms 25:14). In contrast to Ami, a Palestinian Amora, the three Babylonian Amoraim express unfavorable opinions about Ahitofel.

In addition, on b. Sotah 2 1a Rav Yosef states that both during and after Torah study, one is “protected” from the evil impulse, to which Rava⁹ objects that Doeg and Ahitofel engaged in Torah study but were not protected from the evil impulse. Also on b. Sotah 21a, Rav Yosef states that if Doeg and Ahitofel hadn’t misinterpreted a scriptural verse, they wouldn’t have pursued David. Because of the verse, “That he see no unclean thing in you [and turn away from you]” (Deut 23:15), Doeg and Ahitofel reasoned incorrectly that God abandoned David because of his sin with Bathsheba. “They didn’t know that a transgression extinguishes [the merit of the performance of] a commandment but does not extinguish [the merit of] Torah study.”¹⁰ Ahitofel, in other words, was a sage who misinterpreted a biblical verse, a serious “sin” as far as the rabbis were concerned. Ahitofel’s misinterpretation, furthermore, had serious repercussions, leading to his rebellion against the king.

Finally, on b. Berakhot 55b we read: “Said Rav Huna, ‘A good man is not shown a good dream, and a bad man is not shown a bad dream.’ It is also taught thus in a Tannaitic statement, ‘All the years of David’s life he

never saw a good dream, and all the years of Ahitofel he never saw a bad dream.” Only according to the combination of the two sources is it explicit that Ahitofel was a “bad man,” and this combination is most likely the work of a later, unnamed Babylonian editor.¹¹ The activity of this editor supports my claim regarding Babylonian disapproval of Ahitofel.

TANNAITIC ATTITUDES

As noted above, we also find harsh criticisms and negative attitudes toward Ahitofel in Tannaitic sources. M. Sanhedrin 10:2 specifies Ahitofel as one of seven biblical figures who have no portion in the world to come. In addition, a Tannaitic statement on b. Sotah 9a—b asserts that “Cain and Korah and Bilaam and Doeg and Ahitofel...coveted something which was not appropriate for them. What they wanted was not given to them and what they had was taken from them.”¹²

A Tannaitic statement on b. Sanhedrin 10 1b states that

Three saw but did not understand: Nebat, Ahitofel, and Pharaoh's magicians. Nebat saw fire issuing from his penis. (An Aramaic gloss: He thought that he would rule. But it wasn't so. Jeroboam issued from him.) Ahitofel saw a skin disease glisten on his penis. (An Aramaic gloss: He thought he would rule. But it wasn't so. It was Bathsheba his daughter from whom Solomon issued forth.)¹³

The mention of Ahitofel alongside other unsavory biblical characters who “see but do not understand” indicates this Tannaitic source’s disapproval of him.

Sifrei Bemidbar relates the story of David’s unsuccessful attempt to transport the Ark to Jerusalem.¹⁴ Ahitofel sneeringly points out to David that he should have learned from “Moses, your master” that the Ark should be carried on the shoulders of the priests. By emphasizing the fact that Moses is “your [David’s] master,” Ahitofel uses an expression often attributed in rabbinic sources to heretics and non-Jews. Ahitofel implies that Moses is not his master, thus removing himself from the rabbinic movement and perhaps even from the Jewish people.

Finally, on b. Sanhedrin 106b we read: “Said R. Yohanan, ‘Doeg and Ahitofel did not live out half of their allotted days.’ It is also taught thus in a Tannaitic source, ‘Violent and deceitful men will not live out half of their allotted days’ (Psalms 55:24); Doeg lived only 34 years and Ahitofel only 33.” According to this Tannaitic tradition, therefore, Ahitofel’s brief lifespan was divine punishment for his wickedness.¹⁵

ACCOUNTING FOR THE EVIDENCE

Why are the sources distinguishable in this fashion? Why are Tannaitic sources critical of Ahitofel? Why do post-Tannaitic Palestinian sources tend to be positive? Finally, why are post-Tannaitic Babylonian sources consistently and vehemently critical of Ahitofel?

Very likely, the development of Ahitofel's portrayal as a rabbi helps to answer these questions. This portrayal is unknown in Tannaitic sources and is first encountered in statements by Palestinian and Babylonian Amoraim.¹⁶

According to this explanation, the unique tendency of Palestinian Amoraic sources to portray Ahitofel positively is attributable to the greater involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis and their relatively weak position in society. Palestinian Amoraim portray Ahitofel the rabbi positively so as not to decrease the stature of all rabbis in the eyes of non-rabbinic Jews and further undermine their social status.

Our argument, once again, does not depend on the assumption that rabbinic stories about Ahitofel were composed for or delivered before an audience of non-rabbis. Our claim is simply that Palestinian rabbis, due to their greater involvement with non-rabbinic Jews and their relatively weak position in society, reacted to or anticipated negative non-rabbinic reaction to a wicked biblical sage.

Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, had less reason to be circumspect because of their greater isolation and their stronger position in society. They worried less about "keeping up appearances" and depicting themselves positively and felt freer to give their bickering homiletical expression.¹⁷

Tannaitic sources likewise have no problem with a wicked Ahitofel since the portrayal of Ahitofel as a rabbi is unknown until Amoraic times. In portraying a wicked Ahitofel, therefore, Tannaim do not risk decreasing their stature in the eyes of non-rabbinic Jews.

The treatment of Ahitofel in Amoraic sources, incidentally, is part of a well-documented trend in post-Tannaitic sources toward rabbinization of non-rabbis. The Tosefta, for example, portrays Jesus as a non-rabbi but the Bavli portrays him as a rabbi.¹⁸ In addition, there are perhaps subtle hints that the Mishnah considers Honi the Circle-Drawer to be a rabbi, but in the Talmuds the evidence for this portrayal is overwhelming.¹⁹ Haninah ben Dosa is portrayed as a miracle worker in Tannaitic sources and as a rabbi in both the Yerushalmi and Bavli.²⁰ Changing rabbinic portrayals of Ahitofel, therefore, are part of a larger phenomenon discernible in both Talmuds. Only in Palestine, however, did Ahitofel's rabbinization create the need for a re-evaluation of his character.

Perhaps it will be objected that Palestinian portrayals of Elisha ben Abuya as a famous rabbi-turned-apostate and sinner contradict the above claim.²¹ Why do Palestinian rabbis shrink from portraying a wicked Ahitofel but

show no compunction about attributing the most heinous crimes to Elisha ben Abuya?

To answer this objection, it should be noted that Palestinian Amoraic traditions in both Talmuds conclude Elisha's saga with dramatic stories describing his reconciliation with God after death. According to both accounts, Elisha's great knowledge of Torah, combined with rabbinic pleas for mercy on his behalf, effect this reconciliation. One of the major lessons of the Elisha saga, therefore, is the importance of Torah study in God's eyes, and ultimately its power as protection against divine punishment in the world to come. The Elisha stories do not contradict in the slightest my claim that Palestinian Amoraim worried about how they were perceived by non-rabbinic Jews, since in the Elisha stories even the villainous rabbi is ultimately victorious.

Both Elisha and Ahitofel as they are depicted by Palestinian Amoraim enhance the image of the rabbi, in the first case by depicting the power of Torah study to redeem even a rabbi who has fallen deeply into depravity, and in the second case by depicting in surprisingly positive terms a highly problematic biblical character who later tradition depicted as a rabbi.

CONCLUSION

Part One of this book attempted to show that ancient rabbinic sources depict differences between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis. According to these sources, Palestinian sages interacted closely with non-rabbis but Babylonian rabbis tended not to. Furthermore, Palestinian rabbis occupied a relatively weak position in society and had to appeal to non-rabbis for support and social advancement, while Babylonian rabbis occupied a stronger position in society and could afford to keep their distance from non-rabbis. They had less need to appeal to non-rabbis for support.

We argued in favor of the historicity of rabbinic portrayals first because these portrayals are corroborated by non-Jewish sources of late antiquity. According to these sources, Persian society and societies of the Near East in general were rigidly hierarchical, comparable to a caste system, in the opinion of several modern scholars. Movement between and even within classes was extremely difficult and social intercourse between members of different classes was rare. While Roman society was hardly a democracy by modern standards, it exhibited egalitarian tendencies largely absent from Persia. Boundaries between classes in the Roman Empire were in general more porous than those in Persia.

Second, we argued in favor of the historicity of rabbinic portrayals because they repeatedly and from diverse perspectives yield the same conclusion, whether the portrayals are preserved in Palestinian or Babylonian, Talmudic or midrashic compilations. These diverse sources depict Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis conversing with one another in the streets and marketplaces, over dinner or at parties. Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, are depicted conversing with non-rabbis almost exclusively in formal contexts: as judges to litigants, teachers to students, lecturers to an audience and the like. These diverse sources depict Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis as closer, both physically and emotionally, than Babylonian rabbis and non-rabbis. Palestinian rabbis give charity directly to non-rabbis; Babylonian rabbis do not. Palestinian rabbis seek hospitality from non-rabbis; Babylonian rabbis do not. Babylonian sources strictly forbid private social relationships between

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Jews and idolaters; Palestinian sources are less strict. Palestinian sources preserve the motif of the ignoramus or convert who goes on to become a great sage; Babylonian sources¹ do not. These and numerous other differences support our claim that the rabbinic sources in this instance accurately reflect social reality.

Third, ancient rabbinic sources attest to Babylonian rabbinic obsession with genealogy. Babylonian rabbinic isolation from non-rabbis was very likely inspired in part by this obsession, and Palestinian rabbinic involvement with non-rabbis was made possible in part by their more relaxed attitude.

Diverse rabbinic sources, therefore, yield a convincing portrayal of rabbinic behavior and the rationale behind that behavior. The portrayals of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis are common to both Palestinian and Babylonian sources. Were we to view all of this as the invention of pseudepigraphers, we would have to posit not only remarkably clever and thorough Palestinian pseudepigraphers, who invented (1) diverse Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic roles in society and relationships with non-rabbis; and (2) the rationale behind these diverse relationships, but also remarkably clever and thorough Babylonian pseudepigraphers, who produced the same fiction as did their Palestinian counterparts either coincidentally or because they were familiar with their colleagues' work. Both scenarios are extremely unlikely, to say the least.

We emphasized that while Palestinian and Babylonian sources are clearly distinguishable on the issues of concern to us here, they are not diametrically opposed. Palestinian sources also express the rabbinic desire to remain distant from non-rabbis, and Babylonian sources on rare occasions depict informal interactions between rabbis and non-rabbis. A clear difference between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis exists, although it is a distinction between varying shades of gray rather than black versus white.

Part Two of this book relies upon the conclusions of Part One to explain several features of ancient rabbinic Bible commentary. The best test of a theory, we note, is the ability of that theory to predict or account for diverse phenomena. The fact that the conclusions of Part One explain the features of rabbinic commentary collected in Part Two, therefore, is a significant argument in favor of these conclusions.

We observed in Chapter Six, for example, that Palestinian rabbis tend to whitewash David's sins, to portray him as a saint and a sage. Babylonian rabbis, in contrast, tend to acknowledge the reality of David's sins. This difference, we argued, was the result of the closer involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis and their relatively precarious position in society, versus the greater aloofness of Babylonian rabbis and their stronger position in society. The closer involvement of Palestinian rabbis with non-rabbis and their weaker position in society induced them to respond to or anticipate criticisms of King David by non-rabbinic Jews, while the relatively aloof but more powerful Babylonian rabbis were less sensitive to such matters.

CONCLUSION

We rejected the notion that rabbinic comments about David were an entirely rabbinic affair, i.e., that Palestinian rabbis whitewashed David because of concern for adverse *rabbinic* reaction to his character. We rejected this understanding because it leaves unexplained the problem of why Palestinian rabbis were concerned with rabbinic reaction to King David but Babylonian rabbis were not. Why did Babylonian rabbis not share the concern of their Palestinian counterparts with rabbinic reaction to the character of King David?

Once we take non-rabbis into our account, however, the distinction is easily explicable: Palestinian rabbis, societally weak and intimately involved with non-rabbis, tended to portray King David as a saint in reaction to or anticipation of non-rabbinic scorn for a biblical hero who was extremely important to the rabbis as founder of the Davidic dynasty (still operative in the person of the patriarch) and forerunner of the messiah. Palestinian rabbis worried that an attack on David might worsen their already precarious position in society. Babylonian rabbis, who distanced themselves from non-rabbis, tended to view David's character as an internal rabbinic affair. They therefore felt less need to censor biblical accounts of his great sins. And Babylonian rabbis, stronger socially, were less sensitive than were their Palestinian counterparts to the negative effects which criticism of David might have on their social status.

Part Two also examined rabbinic commentary about Moses and found that Palestinians, more than Babylonians, combat the view that the Torah was of human origin. In addition, Palestinian sages depict Ahitofel, adviser to King David, much more positively than do Babylonians.

These features of rabbinic Bible commentary were likewise easily explicable according to the conclusions of Part One. Palestinian rabbis, closely involved with non-rabbinic Jews, responded to or anticipated (1) the notion that the Torah was of human origin and (2) the charge that Ahitofel's career demonstrated that it was possible to be both a rabbi and irredeemably sinful. Palestinian rabbis responded to or anticipated heretical ideas which non-rabbinic Jews might fall prey to, and obnoxious conclusions which they might draw from exposure to problematic narratives of the Bible. More so than Babylonian rabbis, Palestinians had to concern themselves with the attitudes of non-rabbinic Jews. They therefore insisted on the Torah's divine origin, and depicted an Ahitofel who was much more benign than would be suggested by a disinterested reading of biblical accounts of his life.

Part Two of this book argued, in other words, that rabbinic scriptural commentary has a historical dimension which should not be overlooked in favor of exclusive focus on exegetical details. Without denying that exegesis is a crucially important key to understanding rabbinic midrash, Part Two argues that historical factors must also be given their due.

One unexpected finding of this study was that rabbinic scriptural commentary is much sparser in the Yerushalmi than in the Bavli. This finding

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is particularly striking since most of the Bavli's scriptural commentary is attributed to Palestinian rabbis. Why is this so? Why does the Bavli depict Palestinian rabbis as prolific exegetes while the Yerushalmi does not?²

Very likely, the Yerushalmi is sparser in scriptural commentary because of the availability of several outlets for such commentary in Palestine. All extant midrash collections derive from Palestine, and the Yerushalmi, based on the Mishnah, was not an appropriate context for the preservation of most scriptural commentary. In Babylonia, however, which possessed only the Bavli,³ midrashic statements had to be incorporated into the Bavli if they were to be preserved.

The present finding also has implications for study of the transmission of midrash collections in Babylonia. Given the wealth of *Palestinian* scriptural commentary in the Bavli, and its relative scarcity in the Yerushalmi, it is unlikely that collections of Palestinian midrashim were preserved and transmitted in Babylonia. I am not simply claiming that Babylonians did not compose collections of midrash, which most scholars would acknowledge; I am claiming that collections of midrash containing primarily Palestinian material did not circulate in Babylonia. If such collections were available, Palestinian midrashic statements arriving in Babylonia could have been incorporated into the Palestinian compilations rather than into less appropriate contexts in the Bavli. If such compilations circulated in Babylonia, the Bavli would probably look much like the Yerushalmi as far as midrash is concerned. Babylonian rabbis would have had other "outlets" for Palestinian midrashim and would not have had to preserve them in the Bavli. Like the Yerushalmi, the Bavli would have contained a much higher concentration of Mishnah commentary and much less midrash. Evidently midrashim reached Babylonia as individual statements or brief chains of statements rather than as full-length books or organized collections.

This book attempted to derive historical information from ancient rabbinic sources, sources which have little or no interest in transmitting reliable history. The book attempted to steer a middle course between naive acceptance of the historicity of rabbinic sources and extreme skepticism about their historical value.

Rabbinic sources are primarily concerned with interpreting earlier sources such as the Bible, teaching moral and theological lessons, and promulgating or preserving legal opinions. They therefore do not allow us at present to compose comprehensive accounts of the major Jewish institutions and personalities of late antiquity. Nevertheless, they provide us with valuable historical information about the rabbinic period and about two of the most important centers of Jewish life.

These sources also grant insight into the larger host cultures within which the Jews flourished, providing a relatively well documented picture of how this one among many minority cultures adapted itself to Persian and Roman rule. How and to what extent did Judaism of late antiquity borrow from or

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model itself after Persian and Roman culture? The portrait of ancient rabbinic Judaism as a movement of scholarly judges, who were among the leaders of the Jewish people but were at the same time intimately connected to the people they led, has had a powerful hold on the scholarly imagination, but if we are correct it tells only part of the story. What past generations have viewed as a fundamental distinction between Judaism and Christianity is true of rabbinic Judaism in one locality but not the other. It is culturally conditioned rather than built into the deep structure of the religion.

The ancient rabbinic evidence teaches us that we must adjust the questions we ask of the material to the nature and limitations of the sources rather than vice versa. We must be satisfied with partial insight, less than mathematical certainty, and a relatively small number of important, although often disconnected facts rather than seamless, smoothly flowing historical narratives. Often we must be satisfied with hard data only about rabbinic attitudes rather than understanding of the institutions and personalities the sources purport to describe.

NOTES

PREFACE

- 1 Most notably Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael; Sifrei Bemidbar; Sifrei Devarim; Avot de-R. Natan; Bereshit Rabbah; Vayikra Rabbah; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana; and Kohelet Rabbah.
- 2 Regarding the literature deriving from Palestine, see H.L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1991; Reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 300–49; and Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-Agadah ve-ha-Midrash* (Givatayim, Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), pp. 3–10. Regarding the Bavli, see Richard Kalmin, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: Amoraic or Saboraic?* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1989), pp. 1–11 and 151–9.
- 3 At times, the term “early” describes rabbis who lived one or two generations after the end of the Tannaitic period, during the transitional generations between the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods. Rabbis who lived during these transitional generations act in some respects as Tannaim and in other respects as Amoraim. My purpose in this book is not to describe the Tannaitic period but rather to describe rabbinic relationships with non-rabbis. This slight terminological inconsistency, therefore, has no effect on my arguments. Throughout this book, I indicate in the notes whenever the term “early” includes transitional rabbis.
- 4 We find sporadic evidence of rabbinic activity in Babylonia in earlier centuries. In other words, there were a small number of pre-Amoraic Babylonian rabbis, or Babylonian Tannaim, but they do not figure prominently in this work. Most of the evidence purports to describe the period after the third century. See Yeshayahu Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1991), pp. 68–91.
- 5 A significant number of Palestinian traditions purport to derive from an even earlier period, but their historical reliability is highly questionable. Throughout this book, we treat such sources as Palestinian if they exhibit features in common with other Palestinian sources, but make no claim about their dating.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 A brief echo of this story, from a Palestinian perspective, appears to be preserved in y. Megillah 1:11 (72b). Note that the Yerushalmi’s account mentions R. Elazar but not Resh Lakish. See Richard Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 27–9. See also b. Taanit 9a for a “sequel” to the story on b. Baba Me’ia 84a.

For discussions of rabbinic stories as literary creations rather than straightforward reporting of history, see, for example, Ofra Meir, "Sipur Petirato shel Rabbi: Iyūn be-Darkhei Arikhatan shel Mesorot," *Meʾkerei Yerushalayim be-Sifrut Ivrit* 12 (1990), pp. 147–77; and Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-Agadah ve-ha-Midrash* (Givatayim, Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), pp. 235–85. For a review of Fraenkel's work, see Richard Kalmin, "The Modern Study of Ancient Rabbinic Literature: Yonah Fraenkel's *Darkhei ha-Agadah ve-ha-Midrash*," *Prooftexts* 14 (1994), pp. 189–204.

- 2 See *Dikdukei Soferim*, ed. Rafael Rabbinowicz (1868–97; Reprint. Jerusalem: Maʾayan ha-ʾokhmah, 1960), n. *lamed*. Henceforth, we will refer to this work as *DS*. Talmudic citations together with references to *DS* will be indicated as follows: Baba Meʾia 84a (*DS lamed*).
- 3 See *DS nun*.
- 4 Literally, "A Baraita supports you." A Baraita is a Tannaitic statement dating from roughly the same time period as the Mishnah, i.e., prior to the early third century CE.
- 5 For earlier scholarly discussion of this story, see Yonah Fraenkel, *Iyunim ba-Olam ha-Ruʾani shel Sipur ha-Agadah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibuʾ ha-Meuʾad, 1981), pp. 73–7; Eliezer Segal, "Law as Allegory? An Unnoticed Literary Device in Talmudic Narratives," *Prooftexts* 8, No. 2 (1988), pp. 250–1; Ari Elon, "Alma Di," *Shdemot* 114 (1990), pp. 110–22; and Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 212–19. The following discussion incorporates some of their insights.
- 6 Most likely, the story does not criticize Yoʾanan's refusal to allow his student to break out of the rigid master—disciple framework and confront his teacher as a near-equal. I say this because the Bavli depicts Babylonian rabbis either as students or colleagues, but never as students who go on to become colleagues. See Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 103–9. In other words, Babylonian teachers demand of their students what Yoʾanan demands of Resh Lakish according to this story, and it makes little sense to suggest that they criticize him for doing so.
The Bavli depicts Palestinian students, however, confronting their teachers as near-equals. Unlike Babylonians, Palestinian students are depicted expressing halakhic opinions contrary to those of their teachers, in their teachers' presence. See Kalmin, *ibid.*, pp. 97–109. Evidently the Babylonian authors of this story criticize a Palestinian relationship which in their opinion leads to psychological stresses and inevitably breaks out into bitter conflict.
- 7 See also Kalmin, *ibid.*
- 8 See Segal, "Law as Allegory?," p. 255, n. 41, and the references cited there. See also b. Baba Meʾia, 58b.
- 9 See, for example, b. Berakhot 5b for stories involving Yoʾanan.
- 10 Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, pp. 215–16.
- 11 See, for example, b. Baba Meʾia 86a.
- 12 For further discussion of intra-rabbinic polemics, see Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 21–42, and the references cited there.
- 13 As noted above, the story also expresses Babylonian discomfort with a unique form of Palestinian rabbinic relationship.
- 14 Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 5 vols (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1965–70), vol. 3, pp. 102–3.
- 15 *Ibid.* See also Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), pp. 639–48.

- 16 The exilarchate and the patriarchate have been the subject of several detailed examinations and could easily be the subject of several more. See, for example, Moshe Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah bi-Yemei ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1976); Lee I. Levine, "The Jewish Patriarch (Nasi) in Third Century Palestine," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2:19/2 (Berlin, 1979), pp. 649–88; and "The Status of the Patriarch in the Third and Fourth Centuries: Sources and Methodology," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47, No. 1 (1996), pp. 1–32; David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), pp. 131–231 and 277–311; and Martin Jacobs, *Die Institution des Jüdischen Patriarchen: Eine Quellen- und Traditionskritische Studie zur Geschichte der Juden in der Spätantike* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995).
- 17 See, for example, Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah*, pp. 258–71.
- 18 Yeshayahu Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud*, (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1991), pp. 101–9. Babylonian rabbis, of course, share power with the exilarch.
- 19 Our discussion of this issue owes much to that of Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 126–9. For additional examples of Persian influence on Judaism and rabbinic culture, see pp. 149–76, there. Regarding Roman society, see Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, I–II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 2nd edition: I, pp. 418–19; II, pp. 719–20, n. 38; A.H.M. Jones, "The Social Background of the Struggle Between Paganism and Christianity," in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 34–7; and Ramsey Macmullen, "Social Mobility and the Theodosian Code," *Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964), pp. 49–53. Regarding Persian society, see Arthur Christensen, "Sassanid Persia," in *Cambridge Ancient History* 12 (1939), p. 114; and *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: E.M. Munksgaard, 1944), pp. 98–9; Anait Perikhanian, "Iranian Society and Law," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater 3/ 2 (1983), pp. 632–3; and Richard N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich: Beck, 1984), pp. 218–21, 315–16, 329, and 334. See also Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1952), 2nd edition, vol. 2, pp. 190–1 and 234. Compare Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of 'Ayyarab and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1995), pp. 16–22 and the literature cited there. Zakeri challenges the idea that Persian society was divided into four major groups by quoting sources which describe subdivisions within societal groups. These subdivisions, however, are themselves described as arranged hierarchically. These sources add complexity to, but do not contradict, the description of Sasanian Persia as strictly hierarchical. Regarding class divisions in late antique Egypt, see Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 225–9.
- 20 Dio Cassius in *Historiarum Romanorum*, ed. U.P. Boissvain (1899–1931; Reprint. Berlin: Weidman, 1955), pp. 88, 9, 4–5 observes that the decree was motivated in part by a desire to add to the imperial coffers by increasing the number of people eligible to pay certain taxes.
- 21 Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 207–8.
- 22 See Moshe Beer, *Amoraei Bavel: Perakim be-?ayei ha-Kalkalah*, (1974; Reprint. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), p. 258; Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, pp. 316–20; Otakar Klima, *Mazdak, Geschichte einer Sozialen Bewegung im Sassanidischen Persien* (Prague: Czechoslovakian Academy of

- Sciences, 1957), p. 22; and Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 3, pp. 242–3 and 279. See also Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, pp. 200–1, for a description of the hierarchical nature of the Persian aristocracy early in the Sasanian period.
- 23 Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) p. 99.
 - 24 Emile Benveniste, “Les Classes Sociales dans la Tradition Avestique,” *Journal Asiatique* 221 (1932), pp. 117–34; and Ehsan Yarshater, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater 3/1 (1983), p. xl.
 - 25 Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, pp. 98–9; Perikhanian, “Iranian Society and Law,” pp. 632–46; Yarshater, “Introduction,” pp. xl–xlii; and Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, p. 127. Compare Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, pp. 51–2.
 - 26 See, for example, b. Shabbat 145b (R.Yo?anan, R.?iyya bar Abba, and R.Asi ask why Babylonian rabbis are distinguished from the rest of the population by their dress) and Baba Batra 98a (Rav, quoted by Rav Yehuda). With regard to the situation in Palestine, see m. Yevamot 16:7 and Sifrei Devarim 343, ed. Louis Finkelstein (1939; Reprint. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969), pp. 399–400.
 - 27 Ehsan Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater 3/1 (1983), p. 406.
 - 28 Otakar Klima, *Manis Zeit und Leben* (Prague: Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences, 1962), pp. 515–16.
 - 29 R.Ghirshman, *Iran: From the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 302.
 - 30 See Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, pp. 92–110; Richard N.Frye, “The Political History of Iran Under the Sasanians,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater 3/1 (1983), pp. 149 and 160; and V.B.Lukonin, “Political, Social and Administrative Institutions, Taxes and Trade,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Yarshater 3/2 (1983), pp. 698–713.
 - 31 Yarshater, “Introduction,” p. xl, quoting Minuvi 1st ed. (p. 1387), p. 19; tr., p. 44.
 - 32 Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” pp. 397–8.
 - 33 See Beer, *Amoraei Bavel*, p. 258; Christensen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, pp. 316–62; Klima, *Mazdak*, pp. 30–1; S.Wikander, *Feuerpriester in Kleinasien und Iran* (Lund: C.W.K.Gleerup, 1946), p. 193; N.Pigulevskaja, *Les Villes de l’État Iranien aux Époques Parthe et Sassanide. Contributions à l’Histoire Sociale de la Basse Antiquité* (Paris, 1963), pp. 113 and 206–17; Ghirshman, *Iran*, p. 302; and Benveniste, “Les Classes Sociales dans la Tradition Avestique,” pp. 117–34.
 - 34 Sages often disagreed about their precise hierarchical relationship to other rabbis, which not infrequently led to conflicts between rabbis vying for superiority over one another. See Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 193–212.
- My use of the term “rabbinic movement” conforms to that of Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997), p. 1, n. 1, who writes,

Here and elsewhere within this study the terms “structure” and “movement” are used in a neutral sense without implying a formal, institutionalized organization. The term “movement” is e.g. applied to the early Jesus movement by G.Theissen and to the Reform movement by M.A.Meyer, that is, to sets of people at different places and over some time period who share particular concerns but who do not necessarily know each other or have contact with each other.

- 35 Richard Kalmin, "Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity as a Source for Historical Study," in *Where We Stand, Issues and Debates in the Study of Ancient Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden: E.J.Brill, forthcoming).
- 36 See, for example, b. Taanit 24a–b (Rabbah and unnamed interlocutors), 24b (Rav Yehuda, the rabbi, and Rav Kahana son of Rav Ne?unia), and 24b (Rava and Rav Elazar Mihegronia).
- 37 See also Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael, 2nd edition, ed. H.S. Horowitz (1931; Reprint. Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1960), pp. 180–1, which states that at least three people must act as prayer leaders during public fasts.
- 38 This source is paralleled in y. Taanit 2:12 and b. Rosh Hashanah 18b.
- 39 More precisely, the "house of the patriarch" declared the fast.
- 40 See also b. Taanit 21b, where Rav Na?man bar Rav ?isda declares a fast, and Rav Na?man bar Yi??ak objects. We are not told explicitly that Na?man bar Yi??ak also participated in the fast, and he may be objecting after the fast took place, or merely as a disinterested observer. Note that the story specifies that Na?man bar Yi??ak and Na?man bar ?isda are from different localities.
- 41 One source, b. Taanit 23b, appears at first glance to attest to Babylonian rabbinic cooperation, but closer examination reveals the plausibility of an entirely different interpretation. R. Zerika, a Palestinian sage, claims that "the saints of Babylonia" prepare to bring rain by saying "Let's get together and pray, perhaps God will agree to bring rain." It should be noted that the printed text's identification of "the saints of Babylonia" as Rav Huna and Rav ?isda is highly doubtful, since these names are missing from most manuscripts. See Henry Malter, *Masekhet Taanit* (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1930), p. 102, notes on line 6. We cannot be certain therefore, that Zerika refers to Babylonian scholars living in Babylonia. The expression "the saints of Babylonia," in fact, refers to Babylonian scholars living in Palestine on b. ?ullin 122a, where it describes R. Zeira (see Aharon Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim* (London: Ha-Express, 1910), p. 95). Zerika, in other words, might refer to a Palestinian practice, albeit that of transplanted Babylonian scholars. In addition, despite the use of the plural (*saints* of Babylonia), there is no reason to assume that the expression refers to two or more scholars. The use of plural epithets to describe individuals is quite common in the Bavli. For example, the expression "the severe ones of the land of Israel," also used by Zerika on b. Taanit 23b, refers to an individual. Zerika, therefore, in referring to "the saints of Babylonia," might be describing a single, dominant sage announcing his decision to declare a fast. There is no proof, in other words, that this case differs from other portrayals of Babylonian practice, which focus on the actions of a single rabbi and make no explicit mention of other rabbis.
- 42 Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 21–42 and 193–212.
- 43 See also Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 13–15 and 213–15.
- 44 Concerning the role of the patriarch in society, and the patriarchate as a unifying force, see Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1989), pp. 25, 32–3, 134–62, 176–81, and 192–5. See also Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, pp. 170–223. Compare Catherine Hezser, "Social Fragmentation, Plurality of Opinion, and Nonobservance of Halakhah: Rabbis and Community in Late Roman Palestine," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993/94), pp. 1–18, and *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, who argues in favor of an extremely decentralized rabbinic movement in Palestine throughout the Amoraic period. See also the discussion below.

- 45 See Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, pp. 103 and 106–9; Lukonin, “Administrative Institutions”, pp. 713–35; and Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 32–5. For a discussion of the limitations of the term “feudal” as a description of Sasanian society, see Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society*, pp. 13–22, 59–60, and 91–2; and Elton L. Daniel, “Arabs, Persians, and the Advent of the Abbasids Reconsidered,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, No. 3 (1997), p. 547. Zakeri agrees, however (pp. 22–3 there), that the Persian government was highly decentralized prior to the late sixth century CE.
- 46 Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 1, p. 18. See also Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 2, p. 191, who writes that “Since the feudalism of the Persian Empire had progressed further than that of contemporary Rome, mutual segregation of all corporate groups, and particularly the ethnic-religious communities, doubtless was far more complete.” See also Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, p. 149.
- 47 Yarshater, “Introduction,” p. xxxiv; and “Iranian National History,” p. 474. See also Frye, “The Political History of Iran Under the Sasanians,” pp. 116–77, and Lukonin, “Administrative Institutions,” pp. 713–15 and 723–35.
- 48 Lukonin, “Administrative Institutions,” p. 731; and Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (1950; Reprint. New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 50.
- 49 Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 1, p. 17. See also Zeev Safrai, *Ha-Kehilah ha-Yehudit be-Ereẓ-Yisrael bi-Tekufat ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1995), p. 122.
- 50 Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 117–25.
- 51 For more on the situation in rabbinic Babylonia, see Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 15 and 175–216.
- 52 See Chapters One, Two, and Four, below.
- 53 See most recently Eliezer Segal, *The Babylonian Esther Midrash* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 1–2, and the literature cited on p. 2, n. 2, there. See also Isaiah M. Gafni, “The World of the Talmud: From the Mishnah to the Arab Conquest,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1992), pp. 232–3. See also the discussion of rabbinic commentary based on Moses in Chapter Seven, below.
- 54 Babylonian Amoraim: Berakhot 22b (Abaye and Rava) and possibly 27b (an unattributed Aramaic continuation of a Tannaitic statement. According to the parallel version of this source in y. Berakhot 7b and Taanit 67d, the Bavli’s Aramaic continuation is in Hebrew, and appears to be part of the Tannaitic statement); Yoma 69b (Rav, Rav Gidul, and Abaye); Megillah 15a (Rav Naḥman [bar Yiḥiyya?ak?]); 16b (Rav or Rav Shmuel bar Marta), 23a (Rav Yehuda and Yaakov Mina’ah), and 31b (the anonymous editors, and possibly Abaye); Rosh Hashanah 19b (Rav, quoted by Rav ḥinena bar Kahana); Ketubot 3a (the anonymous editors, and possibly Rav Shmuel bar Yiḥiyya?ak, who began his career in Babylonia and eventually moved to Israel), 25a–b (and Niddah 47a) (Rav Huna son of Rav Yehoshua), and 26a (and ḥullin 131b) (the anonymous editors); Gittin 59a (and Sanhedrin 36b) (the anonymous editors); Baba Kamma 82a–b (the anonymous editors); Baba Batra 15a (Rav, quoted by Rav Yehuda) and 21b–22a (Rav Yosef and Rav Naḥman bar Yiḥiyya?ak); Sanhedrin 21b–22a (Mar Ukba or Mar Zutra) and 93a (Rav Yirmiya bar Abba and Rav Yosef); Shevuot 16a (the anonymous editors), Menaḥot 45a (Rav Ashi), and Arakhin 13a (Rav Yosef and Rav Ashi).
- 55 Sukkah 36b–37a; Megillah 15a and 31b; Sotah 48b (and Sanhedrin 11a); Baba Kamma 82a–b; Baba Batra 15a; Sanhedrin 21b–22a; Menaḥot 45a; Arakhin 32b; and possibly Berakhot 4a (the parallels on Sotah 36a and Sanhedrin 98b do not mention Ezra).

- 56 Yoma 9b–10a (Resh Lakish and Rabbah bar bar ?ana; or Resh Lakish and Zeiri; or Rabbah bar bar ?ana and R.Elazar); Sukkah 20a (Resh Lakish); Yevamot 86b (R.Yonatan); Kiddushin 69b (and 71b) (R.Elazar); Mena?ot 53a (R.Parida); and possibly Yoma 69a (see DS *shin*, *taf*, and *alef*); Megillah 31b (Resh Lakish); and Ketubot 3a (Rav Shmuel bar Yi?ak (see above)).
- 57 Berakhot 7d (and Taanit 67d); Pesa?im 28d; Megillah 71b (R.Yosi and Rabbi) and 75a; Yevamot 3a (R.Dosa ben Hyrcanus, quoted by R.Yehoshua ben Levi who is quoted by R.Yaakov bar Idi); and Sotah 24b (a story involving Hillel).
- 58 Yoma 44d (and Taanit 64c) (the unattributed editors); Megillah 70b (R.Yusta son of R.Shunam and R.Mena) and 75a (R.Tan?um bar ?iyya, the house of R.Yannai, R.Huna, and R.Tan?um son of R.?iyya); ?agigah 79d (R.Huna); Kiddushin 65b and Sanhedrin 23d (the anonymous continuation of a narrative, or the anonymous editors); and possibly Kiddushin 61c (Hillel son of Rav Shmuel bar Na?man). Rav Shmuel bar Na?man started his career in Babylonia and subsequently moved to Palestine (see Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim* p. 1143), and it is possible that his son Hillel did the same).
- 59 Megillah 74d (Rav ?ananel, quoted by R.Zeura) and 75a (Rav Yehuda, quoted in different versions by R.Ba and R.Zeura); and possibly Kiddushin 61c (Hillel son of Rav Shmuel bar Na?man (see above)).
- 60 See also Jacob Neusner, *Judaism, The Classical Statement: The Evidence of the Bavli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 100, and Chapter Eight, below. See also David Kraemer, "Scripture Commentary in the Babylonian Talmud: Primary or Secondary Phenomenon?" *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 14, No. 1 (1989), pp. 1–15.
- 61 Ezra 9–10.
- 62 For Samaritan opposition to Ezra, see Jarl Fossum, "Social and Institutional Conditions for Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible with Special Regard to Religious Groups and Sects," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 1/1, p. 244.
- 63 For a balanced discussion of the scholarly enterprise of discerning polemics in ancient literature, see Mena?em Hirshman, *Ha-Mikra u-Midrasho: Bein ?azal la-Avot ha-Kenesiah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibu? ha-Meu?ad, 1992), pp. 96–100 (=Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 125–30).
- 64 According to an alternative version, the statement's author is Rav Shmuel bar Marta.
- 65 See Rav Papa's different versions of the names of the rabbis involved. Our argument is not affected by Papa's differing versions.
- 66 It is possible that Rabbah bar bar ?ana goes before R.Yo?anan. For my purposes, this uncertainty in the story makes no difference.
- 67 For a similar technique in a Talmudic story, see b. Baba Batra 22a and Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 5–6.
- 68 See also b. Yevamot 86b, where R.Yonatan or unnamed elders assert that the Levites were punished by having tithes withheld from them because they did not settle in Palestine during the time of Ezra. Here the Bavli allows the accusation to stand, since the Palestinian sages do not condemn all Babylonian Jews, but only Levites, and they nowhere state that these Levites lived in Babylonia.
- 69 Compare his portrayal above.
- 70 See also Jay M.Harris, "From Inner-Biblical Interpretation to Early Rabbinic Exegesis," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Saebo, p. 268, n. 39.

- 71 See also the parallel on b. Kiddushin 71b.
- 72 See also b. Mena?ot 53a, where we find the familiar theme of Ezra's great purity of lineage. R. Ezra, grandson of R. Avtulas, appears at the gate of R. Parida, seeking entrance. The rabbis recommend him to R. Parida because of his descent from Ezra, i.e., his noble lineage. Parida, however, rejects this emphasis on lineage, asserting that what matters is excellence in scholarship, not genealogy. This source's critique of the emphasis on genealogy characterizes several Palestinian sources recorded in the Bavli. See Chapter Two, below, and Richard Kalmin, "Genealogy and Polemics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996), pp. 77–94.
- 73 Analysis of Tannaitic comments in the Tosefta and the two Talmuds reveals two major themes: (1) Ezra is a second Moses (see also Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–38), vol. 4, p. 355) or Joshua son of Nun; and (2) Ezra is a rabbi. See, for example, b. Berakhot 4a. (This statement lacks a technical term indicating Tannaitic provenance, but many sources lack technical terms. In addition, the source is prescriptive, unattributed, and entirely in Hebrew, features characteristic of Tannaitic sources. Anonymous, editorial comments are overwhelmingly argumentational and in Aramaic. In addition, the source closely parallels a source found in the Yerushalmi, also frequently the case with Tannaitic sources but rare in the case of anonymous editorial comments.) Megillah 31b; Sotah 48b; Baba Kamma 82a–b; Sanhedrin 21b–22a; Mena?ot 45a; and Arakhin 32b. See also y. Pesa'im 28d; Megillah 75a; Yevamot 3a; and Sotah 24b. Support for our claim that the themes of Ezra as rabbi and as a second Moses are Tannaitic is the fact that both themes are found in the Tosefta, which according to most scholars contains almost exclusively Tannaitic material. See t. Sotah 13:3, ed. Saul Lieberman (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1973), p. 231 and Sanhedrin 4:7, ed. Moshe Shmuel Zuckerman (1882; Reprint. Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1963), p. 421. Throughout this book, selections from the Tosefta are from Saul Lieberman, (ed.) *The Tosefta: Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–88). Selections from parts of the Tosefta not edited by Lieberman are taken from Zuckerman's edition.
- 74 This discussion, it is important to note, deals only with rabbinic statements about the biblical career of Elijah. It does not deal with Elijah the supernatural being who directly converses with some rabbis, nor with Elijah the messianic or eschatological figure. To do so would take us far afield from our main goal in this section: analysis of rabbinic commentary about biblical personalities.
- 75 Y. Berakhot 8d (unattributed, R. Ahava son of R. Zeira, R. Yudah bar Pazi, R. Yudan son of R. Aibo, and Rabbanan) and (12) [13]d (R. Yudan bar Shalom); Peah 16a (R. Abba bar Kahana); Eruvin 22b (the house of Shila, quoted by R. ?elbo); Taanit 63c–d (five times) (R. Yosah and Rabbanan (both quoted by R. Berekhiah), the anonymous editors, R. Tan?um Adraya, and R. Yudah bar Pazi), 64d (three times) (R. Simlai of Bira (see also Megillah 72c) and two unattributed statements); and 67a (and Moed Katan 81d) (Shimon ben Shetach); Baba Batra 14a (R. Yonatan, quoted by R. Shmuel bar Na?mani); Sanhedrin 27d (R. Yehoshua ben Levi); 28a (R. Shimon ben Lakish); and 28b (an unattributed narrative); Avodah Zarah 39c (R. Levi); and possibly Berakhot (12) [13]d (Rav Huna or R. Huna) and Eruvin 22b (Rav, quoted by R. Huna who is in turn quoted by R. ?elbo).
- 76 Berakhot 7b (R. Yo?anan); 9b (R. Abahu (see also Berakhot 6b)); 31b–32a (twice) (R. Elazar and R. Shmuel bar R. Yi?ak); Shabbat 55a (R. Yehoshua ben Levi); Pesa'im 54a (Tannaitic); Yoma 21b (Tannaitic); Sukkah 10a (Tannaitic); Taanit

- 8b (R.Yi?ak); 17a (Tannaitic); and 23a (Tannaitic); Megillah 19b (R.Yo?anan, quoted by R.?iyya bar Abba); Moed Katan 25b–26a (twice) (Resh Lakish and R. Yo?anan); Yevamot 90b (Tannaitic); Sotah 13a (Tannaitic); Baba Batra 121b (Tannaitic); Sanhedrin 39b (R.Elazar) and 113a–b (three times) (a narrative roughly paralleled on y. Sanhedrin 28b; a “certain Galilean” and R. Yosi); Zeva?im 102a (and Mena?ot 98a) (R. Yo?anan); and ?ullin 7b (R. Yo?anan).
- 77 Berakhot 6b (Rav Huna, quoted by R.?elbo) and 10a (Rav Hamnuna); Pesa?im 68a (Rav quoted by Rav ?anel, who is in turn quoted by Rava); Sukkah 10a (the anonymous editors); Taanit 3a–b (the anonymous editors) and 17a (the anonymous editors); Moed Katan 25b–26a (twice) (anonymous editors and Rav Yosef); Baba Me?ia 106a (twice) (anonymous editors and Rav Na?man bar Yi?ak); Sanhedrin 39b (Rava); 89b (anonymous editors); and 113a–b (Rav, quoted by Rav Yehuda); and ?ullin 7b (twice) (Rav Papa and Abaye). See also Sanhedrin 63b–64a (an unattributed narrative).
- 78 The absence of Babylonian criticisms of Elijah is attributable in part, but only in part, to the relative paucity of relevant Babylonian commentary. In addition, the Palestinian tendency to criticize Elijah demands explanation.
- 79 For the meaning of this passage, see N.Brüll, *Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: W.Erras, 1874), vol. 1, p. 219; Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (1886–1903; Reprint. New York: The Judaica Press, 1971), p. 1144; *Arukh ha-Shalem*, ed. Alexander Kohut, 8 vols (1878–92; Reprint. Vienna, Menorah: 1926), vol. 6, p. 372; Jacob Levy, *Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, 4 vols, 2nd edition, revised by Lazarus Goldschmidt (Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1924), vol. 4, p. 16.
- 80 *Arukh ha-Shalem*, ed. Kohut, vol. 4, pp. 20–1, Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 522; and Levy, *Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, pp. 144–5.
- 81 See also Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael, Massekhta de-ba-?odesh, Yitro, Parashah 4, ed. Horowitz (and b. Sukkah 10a) (R. Yosi); and b. Megillah 19b (R. Yo?anan, quoted by R.?iyyah bar Abba).
- 82 See Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple* (New York: Ktav, 1947), p. 72; R.M.Adams, “Agriculture and Urban Life in Early Southwestern Iran,” *Science* 136 (1962), pp. 116–19; R.M.Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 74–83; Beer, *Amoraei Bavel*, pp. 24–35 and 62–9; Frye, “The Political History of Iran Under the Sassanians,” pp. 131–2 and 161–2; Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 130–1; and Frank S.Frick, “Palestine, Climate of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 5, pp. 122–6.
- 83 James L.Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990).
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 85 Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 1–21.
- 86 Steven D.Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary. Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 13–22. The issue of midrash as exegesis versus midrash as a reflection of societal concerns is not new. See, for example, Moshe Beer, “Banav shel Moshe be-Agadat ?azal,” *Bar-Ilan* 13 (1976), pp. 149–57. See also Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 4, who argues against the tendency “to posit historical and extratextual reasons for halakhic differences between the

- two Talmuds without first attending to a whole series of internal reasons for difference.”
- 87 Compare Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary*, pp. 14–15.
 - 88 See also Yeshayahu Gafni, “Le-?eker ha-Khronologiah be-Igeret Rav Sherira Gaon,” *?ion* 52 (1987), pp. 1–24; and Yehudei Bavel, pp. 239–65.
 - 89 For detailed documentation of this claim, see Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 8–13, especially n. 30 on p. 10, and pp. 21–140. See also Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, pp. 11–17,
 - 90 See also the story of R. Yo?anan and Resh Lakish on b. Baba Me?ia 84a, discussed in detail above; and Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, pp. 111–13.
 - 91 See b. Berakhot 33b (and the parallel on Megillah 25a) (Rabbah and Abaye). See *DS ?adi*, in Berakhot.
 - 92 See b. Shabbat 19b, in a story involving Abaye.
 - 93 See b. Berakhot 56a–b and Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 67–9.
 - 94 See Richard Kalmin, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: Amoraic or Saboraic?* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1989), pp. 38–65, 106–46, and 171–81 for a description of characteristically rabbinic types of statements.
 - 95 Jesus himself is once depicted as a rabbi uttering a characteristically rabbinic statement. See b. Avodah Zarah 16b–17a and Richard Kalmin, “Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, No. 2 (1994), pp. 156–60. An earlier version of this story on t. ?ullin 2:24 lacks Jesus’s statement.

1 NON-RABBINIC JEWS

- 1 The findings of this chapter are based on examination of the following tractates of the Yerushalmi: Berakhot, Shabbat, Taanit, Megillah, Yevamot, Nedarim, Sotah, Baba Kamma, Baba Me?ia, Baba Batra, and Sanhedrin; and the following tractates of the Bavli: Berakhot, Shabbat, Eruvin, Pesa?im, Yoma, Sukkah, Taanit, Megillah, Moed Katan, Yevamot, Ketubot, Nedarim, Sotah, Gittin, Kiddushin, Baba Kamma, Baba Me?ia, Baba Batra, Sanhedrin, Makkot, ?ullin, and Niddah; as well as copious references in secondary literature to other Talmudic passages and to midrashic compilations.
- 2 For example, Babylonian rabbis occasionally rebuke non-rabbis or criticize their halakhic practices. See, for example, b. Shabbat 121b (Rav Huna) and b. Pesa?im 105a (Rav Huna).
- 3 Regarding Babylonian rabbinic attitudes toward genealogical purity, see, for example, b. Kiddushin 69a–73a, and Chapter Two, below. See also Richard Kalmin, “Genealogy and Polemics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996), pp. 77–94.
- 4 Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1989), p. 49, however, notes that “a striking example of rabbinic separatism is afforded by the necropolis of Beth She’arim.” See also pp. 50–3, there. See also Lee I. Levine, *Caesarea Under Roman Rule* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), p. 212, n. 281; and Zeev Weiss, “Social Aspects of Burial in Beth She’arim: Archaeological Finds and Talmudic Sources,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), pp. 367–8. See, however, N. Avigad, “Excavations at Beth She’arim, 1955,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 7 (1957), pp. 239–55, regarding the practice of some sages

- to be buried with non-rabbis. Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72 (1981), pp. 1–17, raises questions about the meaning of the term "rabbi" in these contexts. Cohen is uncertain whether it refers to sages who produced our rabbinic sources, or is simply an honorific title. The burial practices of these "rabbis," therefore, may be irrelevant to the present study.
- 5 (Incidentally, the expression "the exception that proves the rule" uses the word "prove" in the sense of "test." See S.I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 3rd edition (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1972), p. 183, n. 1.)
 - 6 See Moshe Beer, "Yissakhar u-Zevulun," *Bar-Ilan* 6 (1968), pp. 167–80. Compare H.Z. Reines, "Temikhat Talmidei ?akhamim bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud," *Sinai* 18 (1946), pp. 137–52; Moshe Beer, "Talmud Torah ve-Derekh Ere?," *Bar-Ilan* 2 (1964), pp. 148–52 and 158–60; Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 494–8, especially n. 35 on p. 494; Ephraim Urbach, *?azal: Pirkei Emunot ve-Deot* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 2nd edition, pp. 566–84; and "Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968), pp. 130–1, 137, and 142; and Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1997), pp. 354–7. See also Reuven Kimelman, "R. Yo?anan u-Ma'amad ha-Rabbanut," *Ha-Shanaton ha-Mishpat Ivri* 9–10 (1983), pp. 329–30, especially n. 4, there; Yisrael Ben-Shalom, "Meragla be-Fumaihu de-Rabbanan de-Yavneh," *Milet* 2 (1985), pp. 151–69, especially pp. 161–2; and Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* pp. 53–4 and 70–1. Compare Baruch M. Bokser, "Todos and Rabbinic Authority in Rome," in *Religion, Literature, and Society in Ancient Israel, Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, et al. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987), p. 122. Moshe Beer, *Amoraei Bavel: Perakim be-?ayei ha-Kalkalah*, (1974, Reprint. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), pp. 263–4, concludes, on the basis of one ambiguous passage (b. Shabbat 119a), that Babylonian rabbis received support from wealthy non-rabbis. Reines, "Temikhat Talmidei ?akhamim," p. 149, assumes this likewise on the basis of b. Berakhot 10b. He relies on the reading "Abaye," but manuscript variants render this reading highly uncertain. See *DS zayin*.
 - 7 It bears emphasizing that my argument does not depend on accepting these statements and stories as fully accurate reflections of social reality.
 - 8 See also m. Shevi'it 5:9 and Gittin 5:9, which encourage rabbinic cooperation with *amei ha-are?* for the sake of peace.
 - 9 Mordechai Margalioth (ed.) *Vayikra Rabbah* (1956–8; Reprint. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), pp. 110–14. See Solomon Schechter (ed.), *Avot de-R. Natan*, Version A (1887; Corrected reprint. Hildesheim, 1979), 11, p. 28.
 - 10 See also the parallel on b. Yoma 72b. Regarding the place name "Bostra," see *Vayikra Rabbah*, ed. Margalioth, p. 114.
 - 11 Louis Finkelstein (ed.) *Sifrei Devarim* 354 (1939; Reprint. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969), pp. 415–16; J. Theodor and H. Albeck (eds.) *Bereshit Rabbah* (1903–1939; corrected reprint. Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965) 72:5, 97:13, and 98:12, pp. 841, 843, 1220–1, and 1262–3; *Vayikra Rabbah*, ed. Margalioth, 25:2, pp. 570–1.
 - 12 Ephraim Urbach, "Magamot Datot ve-?evratot be-Torat ha-?edakah Shel ?azal," *?ion* 16 (1951), p. 25, n. 176, demonstrates that the term *mi?vah* sometimes means charity in rabbinic literature.
 - 13 See *Avot de-R. Natan*, Version B, ed. Schechter, 11, p. 27, paralleled by *Avot de-R. Natan*, Version A, ed. Schechter, 6, p. 27.

- 14 See the discussion below, and see m. Avot 1:4 (Yosi ben Yoezer); t. Kelim Baba Me'ia 5:3; Avot de-R. Natan, Version B, ed. Schechter, 11, p. 28 (twice); y. Demai 2:1 (22a) (R. Yi?ak bar Tavlai) and 3:1 (23b) (R. Yo?anan ben Zakkai and R. Yehoshua); Be'ah 2:7 (and parallels) (a Tannaitic tradition, referring to Todos of Rome); Makkot 2:6 (regarding the practice of the biblical figure, Job); Horayot 3:7 (three separate stories, involving (a) R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, and R. Akiba; (b) R. ?iyya bar Abba, and (c) Resh Lakish); Vayikra Rabbah 9:3, ed. Margalio, pp. 176–8; and 34:13, p. 801; b. Berakhot 34b (R. Yo?anan); Pesa'im 53b (R. Yo?anan; see also the reference to Todos, there); Yoma 71a (R. Berekhia); Ketubot 62b–63a (R. Akiba); Sanhedrin 92a (R. Elazar); and ?ullin 92a (“They sent ‘from there,’” that is, from Palestine).
- 15 See ?vi Moshe Dor, *Torat Erez Yisrael be-Bavel* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1971); and Richard Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 87–9 and 91–4, and the references cited on p. 11, n. 31, there.
This is not to suggest that there was no Palestinian influence on Babylonia prior to the fourth generation. Clearly there was, as evidenced by the introduction of the Palestinian Mishnah into Babylonia and Rav's training in Palestine and subsequent return to Babylonia. Rather, it is to claim that there were periods when Palestinian influence was especially heavy and other periods when it was relatively slight.
For a relevant story involving a third-generation Babylonian Amora, see b. Ketubot 105b (Rav Anan). Note that the man who gives the gift cites a Palestinian source to justify his behavior.
- 16 See also the section on possible late editorial authorship (pp. 49–50) below.
- 17 See also the parallel on b. Berakhot 34b, and b. Ketubot 111b (R. Elazar and R. Yo?anan). Compare Beer, *Amoraei Bavel*, pp. 261–2, and the discussion of this story, below. See also the series of statements on b. Pesa'im 49a–b and the discussion of these stories, below.
- 18 See Aharon Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim* (London: Ha-Express, 1910), pp. 270–1.
- 19 A Palestinian Amora who visited Babylonia. See Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim*, p. 1080.
- 20 I have rendered the verse according to its midrashic meaning.
- 21 See t. Terumot 2:13, ed. Lieberman, p. 115; Shabbat 2:5, ed. Lieberman, p. 7, and 13:2, ed. Lieberman, p. 57; Eruvin 1:2, ed. Lieberman, p. 87, and 6:2, ed. Lieberman, pp. 118–19; Pesa'im 10:12, ed. Lieberman, pp. 198–9; Sukkah 1:9, ed. Lieberman, p. 258; and ?agigah 2:13, ed. Lieberman, p. 386; Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael Pis'a 15, ed. Horowitz, p. 57; and Sifrei Devarim 41, ed. Finkelstein, p. 85.
- 22 See also b. Ketubot 52b–53a (Rav Papa, Yehuda bar Maremar, and Abba Sura'ah).
- 23 The printed edition reads R. Eliezer. See, however *DS daled*.
- 24 See also b. Berakhot 10b, Sotah 47b, and the material collected by Beer, “Talmud Torah ve-Derekh Erez,” pp. 152 and 158–9.
- 25 See the Introduction, above, and, especially, Chapter Two, below.
- 26 See Shmuel Krauss, *Kadmoniot ha-Talmud*, 2 vols (Odessa: Moriah, 1914), vol. 1, part I, pp. 7–22; Reines, “Temikhat Talmidei ?akhamim,” pp. 147–52; Louis Jacobs, “Economic Conditions of the Jews in Babylon in Talmudic Times Compared with Palestine,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 2 (1957), pp. 349–59; and “Ha-?ayyim ha-Kalkali'im shel Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud,” *Melilah* 5 (1955), pp. 83–100; and Beer, “Yissakhar ve-Zevulun,” pp. 176–8.

- 27 See the remarks of Yeshayahu Gafni, "Al Ma'av ha-Me'kar: Sekirah Al Me'kar ha-Histori shel Bavel ha-Talmudit be-Dorot ha-A'aronim," *Yidion ha-Igud ha-Olami le-Madaei ha-Yahadut* 21 (1982), pp. 10–11.
- 28 See also Urbach, *ʔazal*, p. 575.
- 29 It does not follow that relations between Palestinian rabbis and non-rabbis are consistently depicted as cordial. See the discussion of b. Pesa'im 49a–b, below.
- 30 See also the material collected by Ben-ʔion Rosenfeld, "ʔakhamim u-Ba'alei Batim be-Yavneh bi-Tekufat Yavneh," *Sinai* 103 (1989), pp. 60–71.
- 31 For more on Mar Ukba and discussion of his probable identity as exilarch, see Moshe Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah bi-Yemei ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1976), pp. 65–7. Compare David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1994), pp. 284–90.
- 32 See, for example, Bereshit Rabbah 42:2 and 44:12, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 416 and 432–3.
- 33 See Henry Malter (ed.), *Masekhet Taanit* (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1930), p. 107, notes on line 21.
- 34 See also b. Baba Batra 8a and the parallel on b. Baba Me'ia 108a. See Beer, *Amoraei Bavel*, pp. 242–4.
- 35 See, however, b. Shabbat 23b (Rav Huna, Rav Idi bar Abin, and Rav ʔiyya bar Abin and DŠ bet; and Rav ʔisda and Rav Shizbi).
- 36 Geo Widengren, "The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire," *Iranica Antiqua* 1 (1961), pp. 152–3. Victor Tcherikower, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), vol. 1, p. 60, writes about Roman Egypt:

Just as the gymnasium education was a mark of distinction proper to Greeks, so the payment of the poll-tax was a sign of degradation marking the Egyptians.... Citizens of Greek cities, Roman citizens, and some minor groups (such as a small number of priests and government officials) were exempt.... Since the overwhelming majority of the payers...were villagers, such payment was considered the particular mark of a socially degraded class, and therefore a mark of inferiority.

- 37 Christine Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 127–70. See also Ephraim Urbach, "The Rabbinic Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts," *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959), pp. 216–17; and Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1970) vol. 5, pp. 27–9.
- 38 This tradition is paralleled, with minor variations, in y. Nedarim 1:1.
- 39 Shimon Haʔaddik flourished during the pre-rabbinic period and is not, technically speaking, a rabbi. The precursors to the rabbis, however, are routinely depicted as rabbis and as models for later, rabbinic behavior and values. Their portrayal in the Talmud is therefore relevant to the present study. See also Bereshit Rabbah 78:12, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 932–3.
- 40 I label the story "Tannaitic" because it is in Hebrew and is introduced by a technical term indicative of Tannaitic origin. This is not to deny, of course, the possibility of pseudepigraphy or later Amoraic tampering with earlier texts.
- 41 See also Kohelet Rabbah 4:17 (Yoʔanan ben Zakkai and Shimon of Sikhnin).

- 42 See, however, Joshua Schwartz, "The Morphology of Roman Lydda," *Jewish History* 2 (1987), p. 43, who suggests that at least some of these might be place names rather than personal names.
- 43 A story on b. Shabbat 122b involving Shmuel, Abin Toren, and a non-Jew probably takes place at an inn since Shmuel and the non-Jew share common space within the dwelling. In addition, the "elder" who hosts R. Yehuda ben Batera according to b. Yevamot 102a is probably also a rabbi since he is knowledgeable in rabbinic traditions and the designation "elder" often refers to a rabbi.
- 44 Ed. Margaliot, p. 801.
- 45 See also b. Taanit 23a (?oni the Circle-Drawer); b. Yevamot 113b–114a (R. Pedat, R. Yi??ak bar Bisna, and unnamed "boys and girls") and 115a (Abba Yosi ben Sima (see Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim*, pp. 752–3) and "two sages"); and b. ?ullin 7a (twice) (R. Meir and R. Shimon ben Elazar) (R. Abahu and R. Yi??ak bar Yosef).
- 46 See also the parallels in y. Shevi'it 5:4 (36a); Gittin 5:10 (47c); and Avodah Zarah 4:10 (49b).
- 47 See also y. Berakhot 5:1 (9a), which depicts sages greeted on the street by a non-rabbi ("May your peace be great"); and b. Berakhot 45b (Abaye) and Taanit 21b–22a (Abaye and Abba the bloodletter, discussed preliminarily above).
- 48 See also the parallel on y. Shabbat 3:1 (5d).
- 49 In addition to the sources cited below, see, for example, b. Yevamot 98a (Ben Yasian), 121b (R. ?anina ben Dosa. The "historical" ?anina might not have been a rabbi, but he is clearly portrayed as such in numerous Talmudic sources. His reference to Ne?unia the ditchdigger's daughter as "my daughter" is therefore relevant to the present discussion. Regarding ?anina, see, for example, Baruch M. Bokser, "Wonder-Working and the Rabbinic Tradition: The Case of ?anina ben Dosa," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16, No. 1 (1985), pp. 42–92); Sotah 22a (R. Yo?anan); and Baba Batra 59b (R. Yishmael son of R. Yosi) and 60b (R. Yehoshua). See also m. Sotah 1:4 and y. Sotah 1:4.
- 50 See also b. Yevamot 106a (R. ?iyya bar Abba).
- 51 See, however, *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem*, ed. Moshe Herschler (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1985–91), notes on line 11, and n. 49; notes on line 12 and n. 54; notes on line 13.
- 52 A story on b. Yevamot 34b describes a woman appearing before Rav Yosef in a judicial context and Yosef addresses her as "my daughter." Yosef is a third-generation Babylonian Amora, however, and it is surprising to find him using the Palestinian form of address. Several geniza fragments, however, read Rav Ashi, and two manuscripts and a responsum of the Rashba read Rav Asi. (See *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem*, ed. Avraham Liss (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1983–96), notes on line 19, and n. 54.) Perhaps Rav Asi, therefore, a Palestinian Amora, was the author of the statement. The fact that the manuscripts refer to him as *Rav Asi* rather than *R. Asi* is not a serious objection against this claim, since scribes frequently ignore (or, more likely, are unaware of) the convention that "Rav X" refers to Babylonian rabbis and "R. X" refers to Palestinians. The reading transcribed above as "Rav Ashi," furthermore, perhaps refers to the Palestinian R. Asi instead, since the second letter of the name might be a *sin* rather than a *shin*. R. Asi's name is usually rendered in the Bavli by means of a *samekh* but the letter *sin* is occasionally used as well.

Conceivably, however, it is the sixth-generation Babylonian Amora, Rav Ashi, who is referred to, and the present case is another example of early Palestinian precedent influencing portrayals of later Babylonian rabbis. Rav Ati, a sixth-

- generation contemporary of Rav Ashi, might also be referred to, since his name is several times rendered in the Talmud as Rav Asi. See ?anokh Albeck, *Mavo la-Talmudim* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1969), pp. 426–7.
- 53 Apparently, Rav means to say that a man can do whatever he likes with his wife, just as one is free to prepare and eat a fish however one chooses.
- 54 See Bereshit Rabbah 11:4, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 91.
- 55 The literature about *Minim* is enormous. For a discussion of texts which portray *Minim* as renegade Jews, see Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 1985), pp. 51–73.
- 56 Rabbi was very likely unique, however, even in Palestine. As patriarch, political head of the Jewish people and liaison between the Jews and Romans, he naturally played host to non-rabbis on a regular basis. See Levine, *The Rabbinic Class*, p. 167, and the sources cited in n. 142, there. Compare Martin Jacobs, *Die Institution des jüdischen Patriarchen: Eine Quellen- und Traditionskritische Studie zur Geschichte der Juden in der Spätantike* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), pp. 27–60 and 124–54. Nevertheless, it is significant that we find no counterpart to Rabbi in Babylonian sources.
- 57 See also y. Sanhedrin 7:13 (R. Liezer, R. Yehoshua, and R. Gamliel) and Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 2,5,3 and see the discussion above. See also the sources collected by Shaye J.D. Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society of the Second Century,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), pp. 169–70, especially n. 52, there. See b. Yevamot 110a, according to which Rav Berona and Rav ?ananel were “there,” which might mean in the city of Nershe where the wedding took place. In addition, *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Yevamot*, ed. Liss, notes on line 12 and n. 42, cites one manuscript which does not read “there,” and other versions which read “sitting there,” which most likely means they were engaged either in judicial or academic activity rather than attending a wedding.
- 58 Ed. Margalioth, pp. 177–9.
- 59 Incidentally, tears by Tannaim are substantially more frequent in the sources than tears by Amoraim. I hope to devote a separate study to this issue.
- 60 See also b. Sanhedrin 67b (Yannai). According to Rashi, this story does not involve R. Yannai, but a non-rabbi named Yannai. I find Rashi’s argument unconvincing since stories preserved in the Talmuds almost always have at least one rabbinic protagonist. Most likely, Rashi’s claim is based on the conviction that R. Yannai would not behave in the manner depicted in this story.
- 61 See also Vayikra Rabbah 9:9, ed. Margalioth, pp. 191–3.
- 62 See also b. Taanit 21a (Na?um Ish Gamzu); Nedarim 66b (twice; R. Yehuda and R. Shimon, and Bava ben Buta); and ?ullin 7b (R. ?anina). See also the closely related phenomenon recorded on b. Ketubot 67b, which depicts a role reversal involving Hillel and the impoverished son of a wealthy family, with Hillel acting as the poor man’s slave.
- 63 See also the parallel on b. Ketubot 49b (R. Yonatan and R. ?anina).
- 64 See also b. Yoma 87a (Rav). See also b. Shabbat 156b (Shmuel, Avlat (a non-Jewish sage), and an unnamed “man”) and the Introduction, above. According to this story, Shmuel and Avlat sit together and watch people going to a lake. Avlat predicts that one man passing by will be bitten by a snake and die. Shmuel disagrees, claiming that the man will return unharmed. When the man returns, Shmuel asks him what good deed he performed to deserve divine protection.

The identification of the man as “an Israelite” is most likely incorrect. The phrase is missing in several versions (see *DS ?et*). The phrase mistakenly claims that the man was saved because he was Jewish, ignoring the story’s explicit

statement later on that he was saved because he gave charity. The phrase is a later addition which attempts to bring the story in line with the larger context, a series of proofs that “the planets have no influence on Israel.” Divorced from its present context, which was supplied by later editors, the story teaches about the power of charity.

On the other hand, without the identification of the man as an Israelite, Shmuel’s behavior in the story is puzzling. Why is he so confident that the man will return alive if he does not already know that he is a righteous individual? Why does Shmuel need to ask him, “What did you do?” i.e., what righteous deed did you perform to deserve such divine favor? Why is he confident at the beginning of the story and apparently in the dark at the end? Very likely, therefore, Avlat rather than Shmuel converses with the man at the conclusion of the story since Avlat is unaware of the man’s merit at the outset of the story. This conclusion requires a slight emendation, such that the text reads “He said to him,” and refers to Avlat who had been mentioned previously, instead of “Shmuel said to him,” the reading of the present text.

Maharsha, s.v. *Azil ve-Ati*, is sensitive to both issues raised above. He too concludes that the man referred to by Avlat and Shmuel may or may not be a Jew. In addition, he explains Shmuel’s statement, “He will go and come back,” to mean, “It is possible that he will come back and that due to merit he will be saved. For Shmuel does not yet know that he possesses merit, since he says at the end, ‘And what have you done?’” Maharsha’s interpretation of Shmuel’s statement, however, is forced and it is preferable to solve the problem by slightly emending the text.

See also the story on b. Nedarim 89b–90a involving Rav A?a bar Huna, Rav ?isda, and “a certain man.” The story relates that A?a bar Huna covered the man with mud and brought him before ?isda. I find it difficult to believe that the story implies that A?a did this with his own hands. More likely, he arranged for it to be done. See also b. Taanit 20b, according to which Rav Huna would open his doors to feed the hungry. This Babylonian source, however, contains no description of the shared meal, and there is no reason to believe that the poor ate together with Huna at his own table. See also b. Taanit 22a (R.Beroka ?oza’ah) and Aharon Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1983), pp. 70–9 and 86. R.Beroka ?oza’ah’s chronology is uncertain. Finally, b. Baba Me?ia 31b describes Rav Safra and Isur as business partners but does not describe the nature of the interaction between them. There is no reason to assume that it was social as well as professional. Note that Safra is said to have ended the partnership without the knowledge or consent of Isur.

- 65 The question is hyperbolic and most likely should not be taken literally. After all, Rav Sheshet son of Rav Idi, who responds to the question, was himself the son of a rabbi. Rav Ashi, who also responds, fathered a rabbi, Mar bar Rav Ashi.
- 66 For further attestation of the Palestinian attitude, see b. Baba Batra 11a (Binyamin the Righteous). See also b. Ketubot 77b, which describes R.Yehoshua ben Levi studying Torah among people afflicted with a horrible, contagious disease.
- 67 See t. Peah 4:9 and Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Feshutah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–88), vol. 1, p. 184; y. Peah 21a (R.Elizer); Demai 23b (R.Mena); Shekalim 49b (Na?um Ish Gamzu); Taanit 1:4 (a “man” and a relative of R.Yannai); b. Taanit 21a (Na?um Ish Gamzu); Ketubot 67b (one story involving R.Ne?emiah, another involving Rava, and several Tannaitic statements. Interestingly, only Rava and Rav Papa comment on these statements); and Baba Batra 8a (Rabbi and R.Yonatan ben Amram) and 9a (Rav Papa). See also b. Berakhot 58b and *DS ?adi* and Shabbat 151b (R. ?iyya).

- 68 B.Ketubot 67b (R.Abba).
- 69 On the same page, R.Elazar praises one who “gives charity in secret.” This may refer to someone who does not publicize his charity to others and may say nothing about how he distributes charity to the poor.
- 70 See b. Ketubot 67b.
- 71 See Krauss, *Kadmoniot ha-Talmud*, vol. 1, p. 17; and Moshe Beer, “Al Shalosh Gezerot she-Nigzeru Al Yehudei Bavel be-Meah ha-Shelishit,” in *Irano-Judaica: Le-?eker Paras ve-ha-Yahadut*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: Makhon Ben-?vi, 1982), p. 31.
- 72 See F.Justi, *Geschichte der Alten Perser* (Berlin, 1878), p. 200; O. Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten Persischer Märtyrer* (Kempten, Germany: J.Kösel, 1915), pp. 1 and 116; Geo Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart: W.Kohlhammer, 1965), p. 279; and Otakar Klima, *Manis Zeit und Leben* (Prague: Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences, 1962), pp. 218 and 278, n. 5. See also Beer, “Al Shalosh Gezerot,” pp. 31–4.
- 73 (1) Ravina—Rava bar Yi??ak (see *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Sotah*, ed. Avraham Liss (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1977–9), notes on line 36, and n. 92); (2) Rav Kahana—Rav Simi bar Ashi; Rav Mordechai—Rav Ashi.
- 74 See also Yisrael Ben-Shalom, “Talmud Torah la-Kol o le-Elit Bilvad? (Be-vatci ha-Midrash bi-Yemei Bayit Sheni ve-ad la-Sof Yemei Rabbi),” in *Batei-Keneset Atikim: Kove? Ma’amarim*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer, et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Yi??ak Ben-?vi, 1988), pp. 106–15 who notes that only in the Babylonian Talmud do we find reference to a “guard” stationed at the entrance to study houses, whose job was to allow only those who belonged inside to enter. David Goodblatt, “Al Sipur ha-‘Keshet’ Neged Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel ha-Sheni,” *?ion* 49 (1984), p. 361, views as Babylonian the motif of rabbinic selectivity over who is allowed to enter the study house.
- 75 According to the version in the Yerushalmi (Ta’anit 4:1 [67d]), “They sent a laundryman to R.Elazar ben Azariah,” although there is no indication that Elazar is in the study house.
- 76 Examination of traditions involving rabbis in synagogues reveals no sources which bear unambiguously on this study. See also Lee I.Levine, “The Sages and the Synagogue in Late Antiquity: The Evidence of the Galilee,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I.Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), pp. 201–22. However, Yeshayahu Gafni, “Batei-Keneset Ba’alei Zikah Historit be-Bavel ha-Talmudit,” in *Batei-Keneset Atikim: Kove? Ma’amarim*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer (Jerusalem: Yad Yi??ak Ben-?vi, 1988), pp. 158–62, observes that the synagogue in Israel is depicted as an important center of Jewish communal life, but that the synagogue in Babylonia is not so depicted. Several traditions place Babylonian rabbis in synagogues, but this does not necessarily imply close rabbinic involvement with non-rabbis.
- 77 See Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society,” pp. 165–8; and Stephen George Wald, *The Babylonian Talmud Masechet Pesahim-Chapter Three. A Critical Edition and Comprehensive Commentary*. PhD Dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1994, pp. 253–87, especially pp. 255–6, 272–4, and 277–87.
- 78 See also Aharon Oppenheimer, *The ‘Am Ha-arets* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1977).
- 79 See Chapter Two, below. See b. Kiddushin 69a–73a for Babylonian claims of genealogical superiority to other localities, including Palestine.

- 80 Compare Yeshayahu Gafni, “‘Shevet u-Me’okek:’ Al Defusei Manhigut ?adashim bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud be-Ere?-Yisrael u-ve-Bavel,” in *Kehunah u-Melukhah: Ya’asei Dat u-Medinah be-Yisrael u-va-Amim* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1987), pp. 84–91.

According to b. Sanhedrin 91b, Rav quoted by Rav Yehuda expresses the belief that the Torah is the property of all Israel and not just the privileged few. In y. Berakhot 9:5 (14a) R. Elazar states, “Every person in Israel must occupy himself with (the study of) Torah every day.” See also m. Avot 2:12; t. Baba Me’ia 3:25; Avot de-R. Natan, ed. Schechter, Version A 17 (p. 65) (=Version B 30 (p. 65)); and Version A 41 (p. 130).

- 81 The portrayal of Babylonian rabbis sketched here is parallel in several respects to the sophists and rhetors who derived primarily from the eastern half of the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries CE. See G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 4–10, 15, 21–30, 43–4, and 80. According to Bowersock, sophists were often descended from sophists and they almost always emerged from the notable and wealthy families of their cities. Flavius Philostratus, *The Lives of the Sophists*, mentions only three cases in which sophists derive from low or middle-class origins. In addition, the Roman intimates of sophists were usually cultivated men who tended to form an intellectual community and passed from one sophist to another.

The careers of many sophists, however, illustrate that social mobility was possible in the second- and third-century Roman Empire. The sophist was expected to aid his city with his money, intellect, and his influence in high places. In exchange he received (1) the gratitude of the local citizens; and (2) entrance into the Roman upper class in the form of advancement into the equestrian and senatorial orders. The sophists, therefore, rose from high status in provincial cities of the eastern half of the Empire to higher status in the major cities of the Roman Empire and even within Rome itself.

There are stories of Babylonian rabbis rising from poverty to riches (see Beer, *Amoraei Bavel*, pp. 258–71), but these stories are not necessarily relevant to the present discussion since changing economic status need not carry with it a corresponding change in social status. The Talmud, for example, has several discussions of a “poor person who comes from a good family” (see, for example, b. Ketubot 67b) which presuppose that the person maintains his high status despite economic troubles. It is the community’s responsibility to see that such a person is able to continue living as he was accustomed to before he became poor.

- 82 See also the parallel on b. Gittin 57b. See also b. Sanhedrin 96a (R. Zeira, citing a statement by R. Yehuda ben Batera (but see *DS yud*)).
- 83 See the detailed discussion of this story in the Introduction, above.
- 84 See *DS alef*. The reading “Rav ?ama” is certainly wrong, since Ulla, a third-generation Amora, comments on the statement. Rav ?ama was a fifth-generation Amora.
- 85 Literally, he “said.”
- 86 See also the parallel on y. Megillah 1:9. See also b. Yoma 72b (R. Yo?anan).
- 87 Regarding Rav Mari bar Rachel, see also b. Baba Batra 149a and b. Avodah Zarah 70a. Regarding Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda, a third-generation Amora referred to as a convert on b. Yevamot 101b, see Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 139–40, for evidence that this rabbi began and spent most of his career in Palestine. His conversion, therefore, is very likely not relevant to the discussion of conversion in Babylonia.
- 88 See *DS yud*, and Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors*, pp. 175–92 and 285–97.

- 89 I doubt that Rava is saying that rabbis who fear other rabbis will achieve higher status in the rabbinic movement. The term *ʔurba mei-rabbanan* is suspect here. See *DS yud*.
- 90 David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1975), pp. 171–91. See also pp. 155–70, there, and b. Baba Meʔia 86a.
- 91 Gedaliah Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), pp. 436–57. See also Urbach, “Class-Status and Leadership in the World of the Palestinian Sages,” pp. 62–3; Moshe Beer, “Banav shel Moshe be-Agadat ʔazal,” *Bar-Ilan* 13 (1976), pp. 149–57; and Dan Urman, “Beit ha-Keneset u-Veit ha-Midrash: ha-Eʔad Hem?” and Ben-Shalom, “Talmud Torah la-Kol o le-Elit Bilvad?” in *Batei Keneset Atikim: Kovez Maʔamarim*, ed. Aharon Oppenheimer, *et al* (Jerusalem: Yad Yiʔak Ben-ʔvi, 1988), pp. 59–65, and 97–115, respectively.
- 92 Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. 3, pp. 131–3.
- 93 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 94 *Ibid.*, pp. 270–1.
- 95 See Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 175–92.
- 96 See *Oʔar ha-Shemot le-Talmud Bavli*, ed. Binyamin Kosowsky (Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of Israel, and the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1976–83), p. 870.
- 97 See, for example, Richard Kalmin, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: Amoraic or Saboraic?* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1989), pp. 1–5, and the works cited and discussed on pp. 151–9, there.

2 GENEALOGY

- 1 This chapter is based on examination of y. Kiddushin, b. Yevamot, Sotah, and Kiddushin, and Vayikra Rabbah.
- 2 For further discussion of the importance of genealogy in rabbinic society, see Rafael Yankelevitch, “Mishkalo shel ha-Yiʔus ha-Mishpaʔti ba-ʔevrah ha-Yehudit be-Ereʔ-Yisrael bi-Tekufat ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud,” in *Uma ve-Toldoteha*, vol. 1, ed. Menaʔem Stern (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1983), pp. 151–62, and the literature cited there.
- 3 See the Introduction, above, regarding rabbinic relationships with the exilarch.
- 4 The printed edition contains a story about the last Hasmonean, a girl who announces that anyone who claims to be a Hasmonean is actually a slave and proceeds to throw herself off a roof. This story is missing from the Vatican manuscript and may be a later addition to the text, copied from b. Baba Batra 3b.
- 5 The printed edition lacks the source about Rav Naʔman, but numerous versions, for example, *Sheiltot de-Rav Abai Gaon*, ed. Shmuel Kalman Mirsky (Jerusalem: Ha-Makhon la-Meʔkar u-le-Hoʔaʔat Sefarim Sura ve-Yeshiva Universita, 1964), Sheilta 43, p. 35; the Munich and Vatican manuscripts; and *Perushei ha-Talmud mi-Beit Midrashe shel Rashi*, ed. Ephraim Kupfer (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 38, all have the source. The Munich manuscript attributes to Rava the public declaration about Bati bar Tuvia.
- 6 See, for example, Adolf Büchler, “Family Purity and Family Impurity in Jerusalem before the Year 70 CE,” in *Studies in Jewish History*, ed. I. Brodie and J. Rabinowitz (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 85. Tavi, the slave of Rabban Gamliel, and Beruriah, the wife of R. Meir, to name only two notable exceptions, are mentioned by name because they excel in rabbinic wisdom and are thus not typical of slaves and women in general. Typically,

- women and slaves are anonymous in rabbinic texts. Heretics who converse with rabbis are generally referred to simply as “a certain *min*” in rabbinic sources. In one story, however, a heretic is mentioned by name because the name serves a specific narrative function and is the key to the story’s point. See b. Sukkah 48b; Richard Kalmin, “Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, No. 2 (1994), p. 169; and Chapter Four, below.
- 7 For further discussion of the likelihood that Mar Yehuda is an exilarch, see Moshe Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah bi-Yemei ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1976), pp. 51 and 189–91; and Yeshayahu Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1991), p. 99. Compare David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1994), pp. 284–90.
 - 8 The Vatican manuscript reads Rav Yehuda, and the Munich manuscript has a blank space instead of a name.
 - 9 The printed text records two versions of the king’s response.
 - 10 Or by Rava. See n. 5, above.
 - 11 R.ʔiyya bar Abba, incidentally, is the Babylonian Talmud’s version of the name which is rendered as ʔiyya bar Ba in the Yerushalmi.
 - 12 For further discussion of this story and the problem of Palestinian sources in the Bavli, see Richard Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 87–110, especially pp. 87–91.
 - 13 See, for example, y. Kiddushin 3:12 (64c), b. Yevamot 45a–46a, and b. Kiddushin 72a.
 - 14 In addition to the sources discussed below, see y. Kiddushin 4:4 (65d) and b. Pesaʔim 62b (compare y. Pesaʔim 5:3 [32a]). See also Lewi Freund, “Über Genealogien und Familienreinheit in Biblischer und Talmudischer Zeit,” in *Festschrift Adolf Schwartz*, ed. Samuel Krauss (Berlin: R.Löwit, 1917), pp. 185–92; and Ephraim E. Urbach, *Ha-Halakhah: Mekoroteha ve-Hitpatʔutah* (Givatayim, Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1984), pp. 204–5 and 313–14.
 - 15 See R.Yiʔak’s statement on b. Kiddushin 71a, paralleled by R.Yoʔanan’s statement in y. Kiddushin 4:1 (65d).
 - 16 M. Yevamot 4:13 and b. Yevamot 49b.
 - 17 See b. Kiddushin 71a and y. Kiddushin 4:1 (65d). The word “sages” is missing from the Vatican manuscript of the Bavli.
 - 18 See b. Kiddushin 71a. In becoming a nazirite, a person vows to abstain from wine and from cutting the hair.
 - 19 T. Eduyot 3:4. This text bases its characterization of Moses on Leviticus 24:10–11.
 - 20 See Rambam, Tosafot Yom Tov, and *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah: Seder Nezikin*, ed. ʔanokh Albeck (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik; Tel Aviv: Devir, 1953), p. 317.
 - 21 Several scholars, for example, Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 290, n. 68, believe that the danger referred to involves genealogical secrets about prominent families. See the discussion below.
 - 22 The “dangerous” information, however, may be about prominent rabbis and not about prominent non-rabbis.
 - 23 See y. Kiddushin 4:1 (65d) and b. Kiddushin 71a.
 - 24 This is not to suggest, however, that the term “greats of the generation” cannot also refer to rabbis or sages. Without a doubt it sometimes does. See, for

- example, b. Pesa'im 66a and 70b, ?agigah 16b, Gittin 23b, and Baba Batra 36b.
- 25 See, for example, b. Pesa'im 49b, where the term "the greats of the generation" is clearly distinguished from the term "a disciple of the sages." The greats of the generation, in other words, are prominent individuals who are not scholars. See also b. Megillah 15a, Baba Me'ia 87a, and Baba Batra 91a.
 - 26 See below for discussion of Shmuel's statement on b. Kiddushin 70a.
 - 27 See especially ?vi Moshe Dor, *Torat Ere? Yisrael be-Bavel* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1971); and Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors*, pp. 90–4. See above for discussion of one or two cases on b. Kiddushin 70b in which Rava, also a mid-fourth-century Babylonian sage, publicizes the identity of the genealogically unfit.
 - 28 See b. Kiddushin 71a.
 - 29 See b. Kiddushin 71a.
 - 30 See b. Kiddushin 72b.
 - 31 Y.Kiddushin 3:12 (64c). See also the parallel source on b. Yevamot 78b, involving R.Ami.
 - 32 Y.Kiddushin 3:12. The statement cited by Berekhiah is attributed to Rav, quoted by Rav Huna, who is in turn quoted by R.Ba.
 - 33 The story also encourages *mamzerim* to take it upon themselves to reveal their illegitimacy, holding out the promise of a longer life to those who inform the community and enable people to avoid unwitting union with an unfit family.
 - 34 Regarding the lowly status of the *mamzer*, see, for example, Louis M.Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942), pp. 204 and 282–90.
 - 35 See also y. Megillah 4:12 (75c) and the parallel on b. Megillah 25b, involving R. Eliezer. This case is clearly distinct from the stories involving Babylonian rabbis. See also b. Ketubot 28b and y. Kiddushin 1:5 (60c), which describe the ceremony of *ke?a'ah*. This ceremony enabled priestly families to distinguish themselves from a family member marrying a woman whom they considered unfit. They would publicize what their family member was about to do, thereby localizing the genealogical blemish and enabling the rest of the family to remain free of suspicion. The ceremony is a priestly custom, and is not reported as something done with rabbinic encouragement. See also Büchler, "Family Purity and Family Impurity," p. 68.
 - 36 Support for this conclusion can be found in the preoccupation with genealogy found in the book of Tobit, which many scholars claim was a pre-rabbinic, Babylonian Jewish work. See Tobit 4:13 and 5:9–14; and Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 53–61 and 63–4. Lawrence M.Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 77–8 and 83, views genealogy and the importance of "creating and maintaining family continuity in the Diaspora" as perhaps the major motifs of the book. He asserts (p. 69) that the book was probably written in the post-exilic Diaspora.
 - 37 Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 127–8.
 - 38 Ehsan Yarshater, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E.Yarshater 3/1 (1983), p. xliii, quoting *The Letter of Tansar*, ed. Minuvi, p. 19, tr., p. 44.
 - 39 See, for example, the discussion of the story of Rav Yehuda and the Hasmonean, above.
 - 40 See also the discussion of b. Pesa'im 49a–b in Chapter One, above.

3 HASMONEAN ROYALTY

- 1 This chapter is based on examination of y. Sanhedrin, chapter 17; Vayikra Rabbah and b. Berakhot, Shabbat, Taanit, Moed Katan, Gittin, Sanhedrin, Makkot, and Avodah Zarah.
- 2 In addition to the sources cited below, see also b. Megillah 11a, Sotah 22b, and Baba Batra 133b. See also b. Keritut 28b for an account of Yannai's cruel treatment of Yissakhar of the village Birkai. The Oxford manuscript, however, and the parallel on b. Pesa'im 57a–b lack Yannai's name, which was probably added by scribes who wished to identify the anonymous king and who were aware that elsewhere in the Talmud Yannai is described as very cruel.
- 3 See m. Avot 2:4, on which this Tannaitic source is based.
- 4 Yehoshua Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibuʔ ha-Meuʔad, 1980), pp. 141–8 and 179–92; and Gideon Fuks, "Josephus and the Hasmoneans," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 166–76; discuss Josephus's portrayals of the Hasmoneans. Very likely, the Bavli's portrayal of Yannai is based on that of Josephus, or on a written source derived from Josephus. See Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Parallel Historical Traditions in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), Division B, vol. 1, pp. 7–14, especially pp. 13–14.
- 5 See, for example, t. Kiddushin 1:13–14 and b. Kiddushin 39b. For a discussion of the image of Yoʔanan the high priest in rabbinic literature, see M.J. Geller, "Alexander Jannaeus and the Pharisee Rift," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979), pp. 203–5; and Ephraim Urbach, *ʔazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-Deot*, 2nd edition (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), pp. 507–8. Yoʔanan the high priest's relevance to the present discussion is not clear. On the one hand, the heavenly voice heard by Yoʔanan according to t. Sotah 13:7 is heard by John Hyrcanus according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 13:283). On the other hand, other than the late Babylonian Amora, Abaye, on b. Berakhot 29a, no rabbis identify Yoʔanan the high priest as a Hasmonean ruler.
- 6 See also Gedaliah Alon, "Ha-Hishkiʔa ha-Uma ve-ʔakhameha et ha-ʔashmonaim?," in *Meʔkarim be-Toldot Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibuʔ ha-Meuʔad, 1957), pp. 15–25 (= "Did the Jewish People and its Sages Cause the Hasmoneans to be Forgotten?," in *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), pp. 1–17); Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 131–94; and Idit Aminof, "Agadot Shimon ben Shetach ve-Yannai ha-Melekh ve-ʔbudahʔ be-ʔSefer ha-Agadah," *Alei Siaʔ* 24 (1982), pp. 114–21. Regarding the story presently under consideration, see Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 137–41; and Jacob Neusner, *The Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 112–13.
- 7 The story's sympathetic portrayal of Yannai's wife has no impact on my findings since the story portrays her as subordinate to the king. See also b. Shabbat 16b and Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 154–7.
- 8 See, however *DS ayin*. See also Shmuel Safrai, "Tales of the Sages in the Palestinian Tradition and the Babylonian Talmud," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), pp. 209–32.
- 9 See *DS ʔadi*. Note the striking use of the term *oraita*, which usually refers to the Torah, to refer to a verse from Ben Sira.
- 10 See also m. Middot 1:6 and b. Shabbat 21b. Similar language is used on b. Rosh Hashanah 18b. Regarding the latter source, see Daniel Schwartz, "Lishʔelat Hitnagut ha-Perushim le-Malkhut ha-ʔashmonaim," in *Uma ve-Toldoteha*, ed.

- Menaḥem Stern (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1983), p. 42, and the literature cited in n. 19, there. See also Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 167–71, for a discussion of Megillat Taanit and its positive attitude toward the Hasmoneans.
- 11 Y. Berakhot 11b and Bereshit Rabbah 91:4, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1115–17. See also Kohelet Rabbah 7:11.
 - 12 See *DS resh*. See also the parallel on b. Sotah 47a and *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Sotah*, ed. Avraham Liss, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1977–9), p. 301. The story was censored from the printed editions because of its insulting references to Jesus.
 - 13 See also y. Sanhedrin 23c.
 - 14 See Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 138–9.
 - 15 The source is identified as Tannaitic by the term *Tanya*, which as noted in Chapter Two is not a foolproof way of identifying a Tannaitic source. In the absence of compelling arguments to the contrary, we accept the term as indicative of a statement's Tannaitic provenance.
 - 16 See also Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70*, pp. 107–9; Sheldon Isenberg, "Power Through Temple and Torah in Greco-Roman Palestine," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), Part Two, pp. 38–42; Geller, "Alexander Jannaeus and the Pharisee Rift," pp. 202–11; Efron, *ʔikrei ha-Tekufah ha-ʔashmonait*, pp. 149–55; and Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 86, especially n. 17.
 - 17 See also the parallel in Bereshit Rabbah 91:3, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1115–17.
 - 18 For further discussion of the various versions of this story, see Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-Agadah ve-ha-Midrash* (Givatayim, Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), pp. 235–8.
 - 19 The major point of this story is not the wickedness of the Hasmoneans, but the halakhic conclusion at the end, which spells out the danger of raising pigs and of teaching one's child Greek wisdom. Very likely, the story intends to equate the two.
The Bavli's identification of the source as a Baraita (*Tanu Rabbanan*) designates it as Palestinian. There is no certainty that this identification is trustworthy (see above), or that a Baraita introduced by this term is free of contamination by Babylonian traditions in accordance with Babylonian reality or opinion.
 - 20 See also the parallel on y. Megillah 70c. See also the version in Megillat Taanit, ed. Hans Lichtenstein, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 8–9 (1931–2), p. 346.
 - 21 Antiquities 13.372.
 - 22 See also Cohen, "Parallel Historical Traditions," p. 12.
 - 23 See also b. Baba Batra 3b–4a.
 - 24 We find a possible echo of this rabbinic-Hasmonean controversy in a source quoted by Rav Yosef, a Babylonian Amora, on b. Yoma 18a (and Yevamot 61a). According to this source, King Yannai appoints Yehoshua ben Gamla as high priest after accepting a bribe from Marta bat Baitos. The R. Asi who Yosef cites as the story's source (but see *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Yevamot*, ed. Avraham Liss (Jerusalem: Makhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1983–96), n. 60 on line 15), is either a third-generation Palestinian Amora or a first-generation Babylonian Amora. See ʔanock Albeck, *Mavo la-Talmudim* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1969), pp. 174–5 and 228–9.

- 25 Compare Moshe David Herr, "Tefisat ha-Historiah E?el ?azal," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1974), vol. 3, p. 142, who claims that to the rabbis the Hasmoneans belonged to the distant past and were therefore of no concern, except insofar as they could derive moral lessons from their words and actions. Compare also Efron, *?ikrei ha-Tekufah ha-?ashmonait*, pp. 131–94. See Neusner, *Traditions About the Pharisees*, pp. 137–41, for a discussion of the historicity of the rabbinic and Josephan narratives concerning Hasmonean times.
- 26 Several sources depict Babylonian rabbis as ambivalent about the exilarchate, of course, and rabbinic endorsement of this institution was by no means wholehearted. See, for example, Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1965–70), vol. 3, pp. 41–94; and vol. 4, pp. 73–124; Moshe Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah bi-Yemei ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud*, (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1976), pp. 162–5 and 171–8; and Richard Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors and Editors* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 81–5.
- 27 See also Efron, *?ikrei ha-Tekufah ha-?ashmonait*, pp. 158–62.
- 28 Compare Josephus, *Antiquities* 14:9:5; and see Shaye J.D.Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1979), p. 253; and David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self-Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1994), pp. 112–13.
- 29 The distinction might also reflect his belief that only Davidic kings are legitimate.
- 30 See also Ephraim Urbach, "Ha-Melukhah ha-Mikrait be-Einei ?akhamim," in *Sefer Yi?ak Aryeh Zeligman*, ed. Yair Zakovitz and Alexander Rofe (Jerusalem: El?anan Rubenstein, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 441–2.

4 BIBLE-READING NON-JEWS AND HERETICS

- 1 For earlier discussion of *Minim* and Christians in rabbinic literature, see, for example, R.Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903); Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135–425* (trans. Henry McKeating; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 184–96; Adolf Büchler, "The Minim of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries," in *Studies in Jewish History*, ed. I.Brodie and I.Rabinowitz (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 245–74; Reuven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E.P.Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 226–32; and Steven T.Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity After 70 CE: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, No. 1 (1984), pp. 53–76.
- 2 The term "Bible-reading non-Jews and heretics" is intentionally vague. It refers to Christians, Jewish-Christians, Gnostics, and various combinations of the three.
- 3 T.?ullin 2:24 and b. Avodah Zarah 16b–17a. The printed edition of Avodah Zarah, which lacks Jesus' name, has been censored. See *DS mem* and *samekh*. For further discussion of this story, including the unconvincing claim that a Jesus other than the founder of Christianity is referred to, see Johann Maier, *Jesus van Nazareth in der Talmudischen Überlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), pp. 144–82.
- 4 See Mena?em Hirshman, *Ha-Mikra u-Midrasho: Bein ?azal la-Avot ha-Kenesiah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibu? ha-Meu?ad, 1992), pp. 9–10.
- 5 See Robert L.Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 66–94.

- 6 See the discussion below and see t. Shabbat 13:5; y. Avodah Zarah 40d–41a; b. Shabbat 116a; and Kohelet Rabbah 1:8, ed. Menaʿem Hirshman, 3 vols (PhD Dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 77–87 (text) and vol. 2, pp. 52–64 (commentary).
- 7 With regard to the dating of Kohelet Rabbah, see H.L.Strack and G.Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1991; Reprint. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 345–6. While the midrash *qua* compilation is probably late, it very likely preserves some early, pre-redactional sources.
- 8 With regard to the dating of Avot de-R.Natan, see Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei ha-Agadah ve-ha-Midrash* (Givatyim, Israel: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), p. 10; and Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 247. See the previous note.
- 9 Sifrei Devarim 48, ed. Finklestein, p. 110.
- 10 Avot de-R.Natan, ed. Schechter, Version B, chapter 3, p. 14.
- 11 Kohelet 10:5.
- 12 See Yeshayahu Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 1991), pp. 137–48. This city is referred to in rabbinic sources as Neʿivin.
- 13 Y.Berakhot 12d–13a (R.Simlai) and Sanhedrin 25d (R.Liezer, R.Yehoshua, and R.Akiba); Bereshit Rabbah 14:7 (R.Yosi) (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 131); 25:1 (R.Abahu) (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 238–9); and 82:19 (R.Yannai and R.Yonatan) (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 988, notes to line 1); Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, Piska 18 (R.Yoʿanan) (ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), p. 298); b. Berakhot 10a (R.Abahu) and 58a (Rav Sheshet); Shabbat 88a–b (Rava) and 116a–b (Rabban Gamliel); Eruvin 101a (R. Yehoshua); Pesaʿim 87b (R.Yehuda Nesia (see *DS reish*)); Yoma 56b (R.ʿanina); Sukkah 48b (R.Abahu); ʿagigah 5b (R.Yehoshua ben ʿananya); Yevamot 102b (Rabban Gamliel); Ketubot 112a (R.ʿanina); 112a (R.Zeira); Sanhedrin 37a (Rav Kahana); 38b (Rav Idi); 38b (R.Yishmael son of R.Yosi); 39a (R.Abahu); 39a (R.Abahu); 39a (R.Tanʿum); 39a–b (R.Avina (see *DS reish*)); 43a (see *DS alef*); 90b (Rabban Gamliel); 91a (R.Ami); 99a (R.Abahu); and 106b (R. ʿanina); Avodah Zarah 4a (R.Abahu and Rav Safra); and ʿullin 87a (R.Yehuda Hanasi). See also b. Berakhot 10a (Beruriah) and Sanhedrin 91a (Geviha ben Pasisa).
- 14 Not surprisingly, Christians always win in Christian accounts of dialogues with Jews. See Lee Martin McDonald, “Anti-Judaism in the Early Church Fathers.” in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A.Evans and Donald A.Hagner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 226.
- 15 These figures, of course, exclude cases in which the reference is to Jesus himself.
- 16 See also the parallels on y. Avodah Zarah 40d–41a, b. Avodah Zarah 27b, and Kohelet Rabbah 1:8.
- 17 See also the parallels on b. Avodah Zarah 16b–17a and Kohelet Rabbah 1:8.
- 18 See *DS alef*.
- 19 The source is a composite, since the opening sentence, which lists the names of Jesus’s five disciples, is in Hebrew and the scriptural puns which follow are in Aramaic. The opening sentence, however, probably never stood on its own since it is unlikely that the ancient rabbis preserved and transmitted a source which supplied nothing more than the names of Jesus’s five disciples. Very likely, the Aramaic material is a later reworking of a no longer extant earlier version. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of this passage on our present argument.
- 20 Psalms 100:1.
- 21 Psalms 50:23.

- 22 Compare Simon, *Verus Israel*, pp. 184–96; and Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977).
- 23 See also Samuel Tobias Lachs, “Rabbi Abahu and the Minim,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 60 (1970), pp. 197–8; Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria’s Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 9–38; and Yeshayahu Gafni, “The World of the Talmud: From the Mishnah to the Arab Conquest,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1992), pp. 232–3. See also the references in n. 49 on p. 416. Regarding New Testament disputes between Jesus and a variety of different Jewish groups, see Arland J. Hultgren, *Jesus and His Adversaries: The Form and Function of the Conflict Stories in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979). For disputes between Jews and Christians reported from a Christian perspective, see Justin’s *Dialogue With Trypho the Jew* (ca. 165 CE). For the Greek text of Justin Martyr, see Justin, *Philosophi et Martyris Opera*, ed. J.C.T.S. Otto (Jena, 1875–81), 3rd edition. For an English translation, see A.L. Williams, *Justin Martyr: The Dialogue with Trypho* (London, 1930). With regard to the situation in Sasanian Persia, including the possibility that Aphrahat, a Christian bishop who lived in close proximity to Jewish settlements in Babylonia during the first half of the fourth century, conversed with a rabbi, see Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel*, pp. 143–4; and Naomi Koltun, *Jewish-Christian Polemics in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia: A Reconstructed Conversation* (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1993), pp. 35–40 and 68–99.
- 24 B. Avodah Zarah 4a.
- 25 Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism III: Zoroastrianism Under Macedonian and Roman Rule* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), p. 68. See also Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963), p. 113. For other Jewish borrowings from Iran, see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge Press, 1979), pp. 76–7, and see the Introduction, above.
- 26 See, for example, y. Maaser Sheni 4:6 and b. Berakhot 56b; and Kimelman, “*Birkat ha-Minim*,” pp. 230–1.
- 27 See also George Foot Moore, “Christian Writers on Judaism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921), p. 200; James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue; A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (1923; Reprint. New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 95–115; and Moshe David Herr, “The Historical Significance of the Dialogues Between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries,” in *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), pp. 123–50.
- 28 See also Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary. Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 51–3 and 214–18; and Catherine Hezser, *Form, Function, and Historical Significance of the Rabbinic Story in Yerushalmi Neziqin* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), pp. 15–24.

5 RAINMAKING

- 1 This chapter is based on a survey of Bereshit Rabbah, ed. Theodor-Albeck; Megillat Taanit, ed. Lichtenstein; and tractates Berakhot, Taanit, and Megillah of the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. For a general discussion of the holy man in late antiquity, see Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80–101; Averil Cameron,

- The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 71–5, and the literature cited on 210–11; and Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1994). For discussions of rabbinic holy men, see William Scott Green, “Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition,” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2:19/2 (1979), pp. 619–47; Sean Freyne, “The Charismatic,” in *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, ed. George W.E. Nickelsburg and John J. Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 223–58; and Baruch M. Bokser, “Wonder-Working and the Rabbinic Tradition: The Case of ḥanina ben Dosa,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16, No. 1 (1985), pp. 42–92.
- 2 The majority of relevant stories involve Palestinian rabbis, although a significant number involve Babylonians. This quantitative difference very likely reflects the fact that (1) most of the relevant sources involve rainmaking, and (2) drought was apparently a more serious problem in Palestine than in rabbinic Babylonia. See the discussion of Elijah in the Introduction, above, and the references cited there.
 - 3 See also Hayim Lapin, “Rabbis and Public Prayers for Rain in Later Roman Palestine,” in *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Adele Berlin (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 1996), pp. 105–29. My thanks to Dr Lapin for allowing me to see the manuscript version of his article in advance of its publication. In addition to the stories surveyed below, see also Vayikra Rabbah 34:14, ed. Margaliot, pp. 806–9; and the story of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and his barber in y. Taanit 3:11 (67a).
 - 4 See Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (1942; Reprint. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1994), pp. 30–7. I follow Lieberman’s translation of the passage. According to an alternative interpretation, the rabbis dream that the prayers of non-rabbis successfully bring rain. The rabbis visit the non-rabbis and ask what they have done to deserve being singled out by heaven. The non-rabbis describe a good deed they have performed and the rabbis pronounce them “worthy of praying and being answered.” My argument is unaffected no matter which interpretation we accept.
 - 5 Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, pp. 32–3, identifies the man as a “mime or pantomimist of a small theatre in Caesarea,” and remarks that this occupation was “despised by the Jews.” See also Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), p. 35, according to whom the man is guilty of hiring prostitutes.
 - 6 A similar story in y. Taanit 1:4 (64b–c) perhaps further supports my characterization of Palestinian sources. This story portrays “the saint of Kefar Imi” praying successfully for rain and being visited by rabbis. The story resembles the Bavli’s account of Abba ḥilkiya in b. Taanit 23a–b and Tannaitic descriptions of ḥoni the Circle-drawer in m. Taanit 3:8 and b. Taanit 23a. It is unclear, however, whether these “saints” are on the periphery of, or completely outside, the rabbinic movement. Compare Shmuel Safrai, “Tales of the Sages in the Palestinian Tradition and the Babylonian Talmud,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), p. 231; and “Yeshu ve-ha-Tenuah ha-ḥasidit,” in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 2/1 (1989), p. 1, who claims that Abba ḥilkiya and other “popular saints... were close to the circles of, but not identified with, the Sages.” Compare also Geza Vermes, “Hanina ben Dosa: A Controversial Galilean Saint from the First Century of the Christian Era,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972), pp. 28–50; and 24 (1973), pp. 51–64.

- 7 According to some versions, R. Ilfa rather than Ilfa speaks with Rabbi (see Malter, *Masekhet Taanit*, p. 106). See, however, the discussion below.
- 8 The printed edition reads Rav. See, however, Malter, *Masekhet Taanit*, p. 106, notes on line 8. See also the story on b. Taanit 22a involving R. Beroka ?oza'ah, whose chronology cannot be determined.
- 9 Several stories, for example, describe Rav studying in Palestine with Rabbi and R. ?iyya, his uncle, before settling in Babylonia. See, for example, y. Kilayim 9:3 (32b) and ?agigah 1:4 (76c); and b. Berakhot 43a, Shabbat 3a–b, Yoma 87a–b, Moed Katan 16a–b, and Sanhedrin 5a–b. See also Chapter Two, above.
- 10 Compare the Tannaitic sources on b. Taanit 10b, which do not define the term “individuals” as “rabbis.”
- 11 Peter Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways,” reprinted in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1982), p. 179. See also Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man,” pp. 95–6.
- 12 Brown, “Eastern and Western Christendom,” pp. 184–5.
- 13 It should be noted, however, that in the Palestinian rabbinic stories, the non-rabbis merit divine favor because they conform to rabbinic values, and act, even if only once, in exemplary fashion.
- 14 See also Martin Goodman, *State and Society In Roman Galilee, AD 132–212* (Totowa: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983), pp. 119–34, who argues for the existence of non-rabbinic leaders of the Jewish community in Galilean villages and cities during the second and early third centuries CE. Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1989), pp. 41 and 176–81, describes the power and importance of the Galilean urban aristocracy during this period. See also Adolf Büchler, *The Political and Social Leaders of the Jewish Community of Sepphoris in the Second and Third Centuries* (London, 1909), pp. 7–78.
- 15 B. Taanit 12b (and parallel).
- 16 Y. Taanit 2:1 (65a).
- 17 I wish to thank Dr Eliezer Diamond of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who read an earlier version of this chapter and made several valuable suggestions.

6 KING DAVID

- 1 This chapter is based on examination of Yerushalmi Sanhedrin, chapter 17; Vayikra Rabbah, ed. Margalio; b. Berakhot, Shabbat, Taanit, Moed Katan, Gittin, Sanhedrin, Makkot, and Avodah Zarah; the references to King David in the Yerushalmi (see Moshe Kosowsky (ed.) *O?ar Lashon Talmud Yerushalmi: O?ar ha-Shemot* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985), pp. 179–82) and Bavli (see Binyamin Kosowsky (ed.) *O?ar ha-Shemot le-Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of Israel, and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1976–83), pp. 344–51); and the sources collected by Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–38), vol. 4, pp. 81–121, and vol. 6, pp. 245–76; and Yisrael Y. ?asida, *O?ar Ishei ha-Tanakh: Demutam u-Foalam be-Fi ?azal* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mas, 1995), pp. 95–118.

For a discussion of some ancient Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes toward King David, see Abraham Rosner, *Dauids Leben und Charakter nach Talmud und Midrasch* (Oldenburg i. Gr.: A. Littmann, 1908), pp. I–VII and 1–92; A. Margalio, *Ha-?ayavim ba-Mikra ve-Zekaim ba-Talmud u-va-Midrashim* (London, 1949), pp. 60–7; Moshe Aberbach, “Ha-Ya?asim bein Ira ha-Yairi ve-

David ha-Melekh le-Fi ha-Agadah ha-Talmudit," *Tarbi?* 33 (1964), pp. 358–61; Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1965–70), vol. 2, pp. 201–6; Moshe David Herr, "Tefisat ha-Historiah E?el ?azal," in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1974), pp. 136–7; A.A.Halevy, *Parshiyot ba-Agadah la-Or Mekorot Yevani'im* (Haifa: A. Armony, 1973), pp. 342–404; Clemens Thoma, "David, II. Judentum," and Lawrence A.Sinclair, "David, III. Neues Testament," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 384–7 and 387–8 respectively; Jouette M. Bassler, "A Man for All Seasons: David in Rabbinic and New Testament Literature," *Interpretation* 40, No. 2 (1986), pp. 156–69; Sandra R.Shimoff, "Hellenization Among the Rabbis: Some Evidence from Early Aggadot Concerning David and Solomon," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18, No. 2 (1988), pp. 173–82; and "The Rabbinic Definition of the Hero," in *Crisis and Reaction: The Hero in Jewish History*, ed. Menachem Mor (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1995), pp. 1–17; Louis H.Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of David," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 60 (1989), pp. 129–74; Stuart A.Cohen, "The Bible and Intra-Jewish Politics: Early Rabbinic Portraits of King David," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 3, Nos 1–2 (1991), pp. 49–65; David Goodblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self Government in Antiquity* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1994), pp. 147–75; and Avigdor Shinan, "Al Demuto shel ha-Melekh David be-Sifrut ?azal," in Yair Zakovitz (ed.), *David—mei-Ro'eh la-Mashia?* (Jerusalem: Yad Yi?ak Ben-?vi, 1995), pp. 181–99.

- 2 I doubt that geographical factors fully explain the distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic commentary about David: according to such an explanation, Palestinian rabbis treat David as a saint because he is Palestinian like themselves, whereas Babylonians criticize David as part of an attempt to assert their superiority over Palestinian rabbis. I explained the distinction between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic commentary about Ezra in geographical terms in the Introduction, above, but in Ezra's case we are dealing with a scriptural figure who has a clear sense of Babylonian Jews as the only legitimate Israelites. The issue of geography, in other words, is prominent already in the biblical story of Ezra, and it is easily understandable why rabbis would express attitudes about rival rabbinic centers by means of commentary about Ezra. David, on the other hand, is an Israelite king, but the issue of the relative merits of Persia and Palestine play no role whatsoever in his saga.
- 3 In addition to the sources surveyed below, see also m. Avot 6:3; Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael, ed. Horowitz, p. 185; Bereshit Rabbah 74:15, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 872–3; Vayikra Rabbah 1:4, ed. Margalio, pp. 14–15; 2:1, p. 37; 5:8, pp. 125–6; 7:2, pp. 150–1; 21:2, pp. 476–7; 24:2, p. 551; 26:2, pp. 589–90; 30:2, pp. 691–3; 30:3, pp. 695–6; 35:1, p. 817; y. Berakhot 2d, 4b (twice), and (12) [13]d; Pesa?im 32d; Kiddushin 4:1 (65b); Sanhedrin 20b, 20c, 23d, 29a (twice), and 30b; and b. Berakhot 3b (Rav A?a bar Bizna quoting R. Shimon ?asida) and 4a (Levi or R.Yi?ak); Shabbat 56a (R.Yonatan, quoted by R. Shmuel bar Na?mani); Pesa?im 119b (and *DS yud*); Yevamot 78b–79a; Sanhedrin 70b (R.Shimon ben Yo?ai, quoted by R.Yo?anan) and 107a (A Tanna of the house of R.Yishmael; see also Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (1942; Reprint. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1994), pp. 162–4); and Makkot 23b–24a (R.Simlai). See also b. Shabbat 30a–b (R.Tan?um of Noy).

With regard to Babylonian rabbis, see b. Sanhedrin 107a (Rava); Avodah Zarah 44a (Rav Na?man). See also b. Berakhot 3b (Rav Ashi); Eruvin 53a (Ravina); and Sotah 21a (Rav Yosef).

- 4 In addition to the sources cited below, see b. Shabbat 105a; Yoma 22b (Rav Huna (see also the statements by Rav, there)); Moed Katan 16b; Yevamot 77a; Gittin 57b; Sanhedrin 48b, 93b and 107a (the first dialogue between David and Hushai) (see also Aharon Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1983), p. 66, especially the references cited in n. 11, there); and Avodah Zarah 44a. See also the statement attributed to Rabbah bar Shmuel (a third-generation Babylonian sage) on b. Megillah 14a–b, and the parallel on y. Sanhedrin 20b, which is cited without attribution. See also b. Eruvin 63a (and *DS ?et*). See also b. Berakhot 62b (and *DS shin*). The name R. Elazar perhaps entered the text due to the surrounding comments, which are attributed to him.
- 5 See Sifrei Bemidbar 137, ed. Haim Shaul Horowitz (1917; Reprint. Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1966), p. 183 (see also the parallels on b. Yoma 86b); Sifrei Devarim 26, ed. Finkelstein, pp. 36–8; the commentary of Finkelstein, p. 36, n. 2, there; and Louis Finkelstein, “The Transmission of the Early Rabbinic Traditions,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 16 (1941), pp. 125–7; and 51, ed. Finkelstein, p. 116; y. Rosh Hashanah 56b (R. Yudan son of R. Shalom); Taanit 65d (R. Abahu states that “David said to God, ‘Master of the world, every strait I entered, you broadened for me. I entered the narrow strait of Bathsheba and you gave me Solomon. I entered the narrow strait of Israel [referring to his census?] and you gave me the Temple.’” R. Abahu refers to David’s actions as narrow straits, as difficulties, rather than as transgressions); and b. Moed Katan 16b (and parallel) (R. Yonatan quoted by R. Shmuel bar Na?mani mentions David’s repentance, from which we can infer that David sinned. See also Vayikra Rabbah 7:2, ed. Margalit, pp. 1 59–61) and b. Kiddushin 43a.
- 6 Presumably Rabbi continues to quote and explicate Nathan’s statement: “‘And you killed him with the sword of the Ammonites (2 Samuel 12:9).’ Just as you are not punished regarding the sword of the Ammonites, so too you are not punished regarding Uriah the Hittite.”
- 7 See also b. Moed Katan 22b (R. Abahu).
- 8 See ?anokh Albeck, *Mavo la-Talmudim* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1969), p. 214.
- 9 See n. 3, above.
- 10 See n. 4, above. See also nn. 11–21, below.
- 11 See also the parallels on b. Kiddushin 76b and Sanhedrin 49a.
- 12 Compare Shimoff, “Hellenization Among the Rabbis,” p. 177, n. 33. See also p. 178, where she confuses Rav with Rabbi.
- 13 See also the parallel on b. Sanhedrin 107b. See also b. Moed Katan 9a.
- 14 See also Rav’s statement quoted by Rav Yehuda toward the bottom of b. Shabbat 30a, according to which God refuses to grant a series of requests by David.
- 15 See also Ephraim Urbach, “Ha-Melukhah ha-Mikrait be-Einei ?akhamim,” in *Sefer Yi?ak Aryeh Zeligman*, ed. Yair Zakowitz and Alexander Rofe (Jerusalem: El?anan Rubenstein, 1983), vol. 2, p. 443.
- 16 The Talmud itself is aware of this problem. See the objection by Abaye Kashisha, to which the Talmud has no response, concluding simply that “this is difficult.”
- 17 Accordingly, Rav’s statement should perhaps not be understood as denial of David’s adultery but as emphasis on his role in the death of Uriah.
- 18 See 2 Samuel 16:1–4 and 19:16–30.
- 19 Also on b. Sanhedrin 107a, Rava maintains that Bathsheba was an appropriate match for David from the time of the six days of creation, but claims that “she came to him through pain.” See also the portrayal of David and Joab on b. Baba Batra 21a–b. Perhaps this portrayal is part of the statement of Rav Dimi of

Nehardea, a fourth-generation Babylonian Amora. It might also be a separate source, however, added to the discussion by a later editor.

Incidentally, Rava's belief on b. Sanhedrin 107a is shared by a Tanna of the house of R. Yishmael, who claims that David "ate her when she was unripe," i.e., had sex with her before the appropriate time. The similarity between Rava's and the Tanna's statements, however, as well as the fact that the Tanna's statement is found in no undeniably Palestinian source, make it suspect as having taken on Babylonian coloring. See Albeck, *Mavo la-Talmudim*, pp. 39–43, regarding the "Amoraic" quality of statements introduced by the term "Tanna of the house of R. Yishmael."

- 20 According to Herr, "Tefisat ha-Historiah Ezel ?azal," pp. 138–9, rabbinic sources portray righteous biblical characters as wicked and wicked characters as righteous to teach the following moral lessons: (1) righteous people should not become complacent about their righteousness, and (2) the wicked should not despair of the possibility of repentance. Herr's theory fails to explain why Palestinian sources tend to portray David as righteous and Babylonian sources tend to criticize the king. Perhaps the editors of the Talmuds, by including both positive Palestinian and negative Babylonian sources, intend the moral lesson hypothesized by Herr. Just as plausibly, however, the editors in this instance are passive collectors of material from the past, and intend no moral lesson whatsoever.
- 21 Compare Shimoff, "The Rabbinic Definition of the Hero," pp. 7–11.
- 22 B. Shabbat 30a (see, however, Makkot 10a, where the same idea is attributed to R. Yehoshua ben Levi) and Sanhedrin 107a.
- 23 See, for example, the material collected by Moshe Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah bi-Yemei ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud* (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1976), pp. 179–84.
- 24 Beer, *Rashut ha-Golah*, pp. 179–84.
- 25 B. Sanhedrin 98b.
- 26 B. Sanhedrin 98b.
- 27 With regard to the text of the mishnah, see Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Feshutah*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), p. 1220.
- 28 See M.B. Lerner, "The External Tractates," in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. Shmuel Safrai, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum II/III*, Part One (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987), pp. 399–400; Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 112; and Debra Reed Blank, *Soferim: A Commentary to Chapters 10–12 and a Reconsideration of the Evidence* (PhD Dissertation, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1998). Blank casts doubt on the Palestinian provenance of chapters 10–21 of Soferim, but accepts the Palestinian origin of chapters 6–9.
- 29 See also Chapter One, above.
- 30 The conclusions of this and the following chapters are based on examination of references to Moses in the Yerushalmi (see *O?ar Lashon Talmud Yerushalmi: O?ar ha-Shemot*, ed. Kosowsky, pp. 537–40); and Bavli (see *O?ar ha-Shemot le-Talmud Bavli*, ed. Kosowsky, pp. 1047–58; and the sources collected by Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 2, pp. 245–375; vol. 3, pp. 5–481; vol. 5, pp. 391–439; and vol. 6, pp. 1–167; and ?asida, *O?ar Ishei ha-Tanakh*, pp. 252–93).

For earlier discussions of ancient rabbinic attitudes toward Moses, see Aaron Rosmarin, *Moses im Licht der Agadah* (New York: The Goldblatt Publishing Co., 1932); Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johanne Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), pp. 176–215; Renée Bloch, "Die Gestalt des Moses in der Rabbinischen Tradition," in *Moses in Schrift und Überlieferung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963), pp. 95–171; Judah Goldin, "The Death of Moses:

An Exercise in Midrashic Transposition,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987).

For discussion of ancient attitudes toward Moses outside of the rabbinic tradition, see Isaac Heinemann, “Moses,” in *Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertums-Wissenschaft*, ed. Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll (Stuttgart: J.B.Metzler, 1933), 16/1, cols. 359–75; Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 100–75 and 216–319; John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Halevy, *Parshiyot ba-Agadah*, pp. 169–280; Burton L. Mack, “Under the Shadow of Moses: Authorship and Authority in Hellenistic Judaism,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1982 Seminar Papers*, ed. Kent Harold Richards (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 299–318; Gohei Hata, “The Story of Moses Interpreted Within the Context of Anti-Semitism,” in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 180–97; Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), pp. 76–81; Scott J. Hafemann, “Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Survey,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 7 (1990), pp. 79–104; and John M. G. Barclay, “Manipulating Moses: Exodus 2:10–15 in Egyptian Judaism and the New Testament,” in *Text and Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson*, ed. Robert P. Carroll (Sheffield, England: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1992), pp. 20–40.

- 31 Elsewhere on b. Berakhot 63b, according to one of two versions of a statement by R. Yi?ak, God is likewise unhappy with Moses’s removal of the tabernacle, and He orders Moses to return it to its original place inside the camp. See also the anonymous editorial commentary on b. Zeva?im 101a, according to which Moses is defeated in a halakhic argument with Aaron but acknowledges his error.
- 32 See Exodus 4:24–26.
- 33 On b. Nedarim 31b, Rabbi (or R. Yosi) finds it unbelievable that Moses would have been guilty of such a sin, and claims that Moses was guilty of the much less serious sin of slightly delaying his son’s circumcision until after he had arranged for lodging.
- 34 See, for example, Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (1886–1903; Reprint. New York: The Judaica Press, 1971), p. 522; and Alexander Kohut (ed.), *Arukh ha-Shalem*, 8 vols (1878–92; Reprint. Vienna: Menorah, 1926), vol. 4, pp. 20–1.
- 35 See also b. Sanhedrin 82a. Unfortunately, no source is specified. Rav’s statement based on the unattributed source may have originally been based on the scriptural text, as Shmuel’s and R. Yo?anan’s statements clearly are.
- 36 See also Bloch, “Die Gestalt des Moses in der Rabbinischen Tradition,” p. 121, and the references cited in n. 64, there.
- 37 Deuteronomy 1:17.
- 38 See also b. Zeva?im 101b–102a.
- 39 See also Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael, Masekhta de-Amalek, Be-shala?, Parashah 1, ed. Horowitz, p. 180; Mekhilta de-R. Shimon bar Yo?ai, ed. Y. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed (1955; Reprint. Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 3–4; Midrash Tannaim, ed. David Hoffmann (1908–9; Reprint. Jerusalem, 1984), p. 178; Avot de-R. Natan, ed. Schechter, Version A, p. 49; and Version B, p. 50; Vayikra Rabbah 11:5, ed. Margalit, pp. 225–6; y. Horayot 48b (R. Yo?anan); b. Berakhot 31b (R. Yo?anan); Shabbat 55a–b (R. Shimon ben Elazar); Rosh Hashanah 21b (Rav or Shmuel); Nedarim 38a (Rava); Sotah 13b (R. Levi); Baba Batra 9b (R. Elazar) and 88b–89a

- (R.Levi); and Sanhedrin 20a (R.Yonatan quoted by R.Shmuel bar Na?man). See also Rosmarin, *Moshe im Licht der Agada*, pp. 23–6.
- 40 Gager, *Moses*, pp. 134–61.
- 41 For evidence of the divinization of Moses, see the Samaritan work, *Memar Markah* 1:2, 9; 2:12; 4:1; 5:3–4; John MacDonald, “The Samaritan Doctrine of Moses,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3 (1960), pp. 149–62; and Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Images of Moses* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), pp. 148–55. See also Pieter W. van der Horst, “The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M.J.Mulder, *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* II/I (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), ed. Mulder, pp. 523–5 and 534–5. See also Howard M.Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1957), pp. 39–41, and the literature cited there; Aaron Rothkoff, “Moses,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Macmillan, 1972), vol. 12, col. 393; and Louis Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part One,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 82, Nos 3–4 (1992), pp. 288–9. Regarding Moses the miracle worker in Syriac Christian literature of the fourth and fifth centuries, see Raymond Marie Tonneau, “Moses in der Syrische Tradition,” in *Moses in Schrift und Überlieferung*, p. 269.

7 MOSES

- 1 The expression is frequently found in the Bible, which makes the rabbinic avoidance of it all the more striking. See Joshua 8:31–32 and 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Malakhi 3:22; Daniel 9:11; 13; Ezra 3:2 and 7:6; Nehemiah 8:1; 2 Chronicles 23:18 and 35:12.
- 2 See also b. Sanhedrin 22b and 83b.
- 3 See the introductory chapter, above.
- 4 The text actually reads “truthful,” but this is an obvious euphemism. The author, or the Talmud’s scribes, did not want to describe the Torah as untruthful.
- 5 The source lacks a technical term indicative of a Tannaitic source, but the Yerushalmi is relatively sparse in such terms so the absence of the term tells us very little. More telling is the fact that the source is entirely in Hebrew, is prescriptive in nature, and lacks attribution.
- 6 See, for example, Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 1:45; and 7:23; Acts 13:38–9; 15:5 and 28:23; 1 Corinthians 9:9; and Hebrews 10:28. See also Hecataeus, quoted in Diodorus of Sicily, *World History*, ed. and transl. Russel M.Greer (London, 1954) 40:3. See also Mena?em Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1974–84), vol. 2, pp. 103, 535, 540, and 656; and Florence Morgan Gillman, “Moses,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 4, p. 918.
- 7 See, for example, The Book of Tobit 1:8; 6:12–13; 7:11–13; ed. and transl. Frank Zimmerman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958); 1 Esdras 1:12; 5:48; 7:6 and 9; 9:39; Baruch 2:2; Daniel and Susannah 1:3 and 62; Josephus, *Antiquities* 8:192, ed. and transl. H. St. J.Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926); Rule of the Community 5:8–9 and 8:22; The Damascus Document 15:2, 8–9, and 12; 16:2 and 4–5 (see *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek Texts with English Translations*, Vol. 1, Rule of the Community and Related Documents, and Vol. 2, Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents, ed. James H.Charlesworth (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1994–5); Sefer Ben Sira ha-Shalem 24:33, ed. Moshe Zvi Segal (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1953); Letter of

- Aristeas 139, 144, 147–53, 162, 168, ed. and transl. Moses Hadas (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951). See also Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2:145; and 5:401; *Antiquities* 1:6, 15, 18; 3:180; 4:15, 156, 165; and *Against Apion* 2:153–4, 161, 165, 257, ed. and transl. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) and Scott J. Hafemann, “Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Survey,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 7 (1990), pp. 80–8; Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King Moses Traditions and the Johannean Christology*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), pp. 112–13, 130, 132, 287; David Lenz Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972), pp. 212–13; Daniel Jeremy Silver, “Moses and the Hungry Birds,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 64 (1973–4), p. 144; and Louis Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part Three,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83, Nos 3–4 (1993), pp. 301–5; 308–13; and 321. See also the Damascus Document 5:8 and 8:14; Rule of the Community 1:3; Matthew 22:24 and Romans 10:19.
- 8 See also b. Yevamot 49b–50a (Rava).
- 9 Moshe Weinfeld, “God Versus Moses in the Temple Scroll: ‘I do not Speak on my Own but on God’s Authority’ (*Sifrei Deut.* Sec. 5; *John*, 12, 48f),” *Revue de Qumran* 15, Nos 1–2 (1991), p. 175. On p. 176, there, Weinfeld argues that the term “the Torah of Moses” in Deuteronomy expresses the fact that “Moses presents the laws in his own name as they were revealed to him.” Weinfeld also claims (p. 180) that “the term *the Torah of Moses* coined by the Deuteronomist (Jos. 8, 31; 23, 6; 2 Kgs 14, 6...) which could be understood as Moses’ *own law*, motivated the retroversion from Moses to God as well as the specific statements that it was not Moses speaking on his own but on behalf of God.” See below.
- 10 Weinfeld, “God Versus Moses,” p. 175. See also pp. 176–80, there.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80.
- 12 See also Louis Feldman, “Use, Authority, and Exegesis in the Writings of Josephus,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M.J. Mulder, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* II/I (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), pp. 503–7; and “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part One” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 82, Nos 3–4 (1992), pp. 300 and 320; and “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part Two,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 83, Nos 1–2 (1992), pp. 9–11. Feldman argues that Josephus deemphasizes the role of God in his retelling of the biblical narrative, to make his account more palatable to a sophisticated, rationalistic, educated Greek audience. See also Heinrich Bloch, *Die Quellen der Flavius Josephus in seiner Archäologie* (Leipzig: R.J. Tübner, 1879), pp. 139–40, who notes that the rabbis never refer to Moses as lawgiver but as “our teacher.” See also Horst R. Moehring, “Rationalization of Miracles in the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur* 112 (1973), pp. 376–83.
- 13 See also Rimon Kasher, “The Interpretation of Scripture in Rabbinic Literature,” in *Mikra*, ed. Mulder, pp. 548–50; and Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*, ed. Guido Kisch (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1949), 12:2 (compared to Exodus 32:1). See also the English translation, H.R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (1917: Reprint, New York: Ktav, 1971).
- 14 See also m. Avot 1:1 and y. Sanhedrin 10:1.
- 15 See also b. Megillah 31 b and Baba Batra 88b–89, and Louis Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 36. See also Bereshit Rabbah 1:1, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 2; and Avot de-R. Natan, Version A, ed. Schechter, p. 10.
- 16 Ed. Finkelstein, p. 427.

- 17 See also b. ṭullin 60b (Rav ṭanan bar Rava) and Aharon Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim* (London: Ha-Express, 1910), pp. 468–70.
- 18 See also Renée Bloch, “Die Gestalt des Moses in der Rabbinischen Tradition,” in *Moses in Schrift und Überlieferung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963), pp. 122–4. See Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 301–5, for a discussion of the Gospel of John’s view that Jesus was nothing other than God’s emissary. Meeks argues that the Gospel of John’s portrayal of Jesus’ relationship to God is modelled on Jewish portrayals of Moses’ relationship to God.
- 19 It is no accident that the “Palestinian position” is occasionally attributed to later Babylonian rabbis. See b. Sanhedrin 8a (twice) (Rav Naṭman bar Yiṭṭak and the anonymous editors). As noted repeatedly throughout this book, the fourth Babylonian Amoraic generation witnessed a major influx of Palestinian learning into Babylonia, which influenced the way rabbis behaved or the way they were depicted by later authors and storytellers.
- 20 See, however, b. Makkot 24a (R. Yosi son of R. ṭanina). We find a tendency to portray Moses in this fashion in Josephus, Philo, and many pseudepigrapha and Christian works. See, for example, Jubilees 1:18–21 (see James C. VanderKam, *A Critical Text and English Translation of the Ethiopic Book of Jubilees*, 2 vols (Leuven: Peeters, 1989)); Testament of Moses, chapters 11–12 (see *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1983)); Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 10:4–5; 12:8–10; 15:7; 19:3, and 8–9; Philo, *On Moses* 2:166, ed. and transl. F.H. Colson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929); and Josephus, *Antiquities* 3:5–21, 83–8, 298, 308–10; 4:194 and Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 118, 137, and 159–60. For modern scholarly discussion, see Jean Danielou, “Moses bei Gregory von Nyssa: Vorbild und Gestalt,” in *Moses in Schrift und Überlieferung*, p. 293; Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 137, 160–1, and 294; David Lenz Tiede, “The Figure of Moses in the Testament of Moses,” in *Studies on the Testament of Moses* (Cambridge: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), pp. 86–92; Hafemann, “Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” pp. 89–99; and Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrait of Moses, Part Three,” p. 305. For an earlier survey of Moses’ role as intercessor in rabbinic sources, see Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 200–4. For Moses as intercessor in Syriac Christian sources, see Raymond Marie Tonneau, “Moses in der Syrische Tradition,” in *Moses in Schrift und Überlieferung*, p. 271.
- 21 See b. Berakhot 7a (the anonymous editors, commenting on a statement by R. Yosi quoted by R. Yoṭanan); 10b (R. Yosi ben Zimra, quoted by R. Yoṭanan); 30b (the anonymous editors, based on statements by Rav Huna and Rav ṭisda); 32a (R. Elazar (three times)); 32a (statements by Rava, Shmuel, R. Yiṭṭak, Rabbanan, and R. Eliezer the Great); and 32b (R. Elazar (twice)); Shabbat 30a (R. Tanṭum of Noy); Pesaṭim 119a (R. Yishmael son of R. Yosi, quoted by Rav Kahana); Yoma 36b (a Tannaitic source); Sotah 14a (R. Simlai); and 36b–37a (a Tannaitic statement); and Baba Batra 8a (Rav Naṭman bar Yiṭṭak).
- 22 See b. Sotah 7b (R. Yonatan (The printed texts say R. Yoṭanan but see Avraham Liss (ed.), *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Sotah*, notes on line 18, and n. 70 (Jerusalem: Makhon ha Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1977–9)) quoted by R. Shmuel bar Naṭmani) and 34b (Rava).
- 23 See b. Berakhot 32a (R. Simai); 32b (R. ṭanina); 33b (a story about R. ṭanina); and 34a (R. Eliezer in a Tannaitic source); and Yoma 69b (R. Yehoshua ben Levi).
- 24 See b. Berakhot 32a (R. Yonatan, quoted by R. Shmuel bar Naṭmani); 33b (R. ṭanina); 54a (a Tannaitic statement); 54b (an unattributed Aramaic story); and 63b (R. Abin Halevi); Shabbat 88b–89a (R. Yehoshua ben Levi); Taanit 9a (a

Tannaïtic statement); Megillah 14a (Rav, quoted by Rav Na?man or Rav Amram (see the parallel on b. Sotah 12b)); and Sotah 12b (an unattributed story) and 35a (Rabbah or the anonymous editors).

See also Jeremiah 15:1 (“God said to me, ‘Even if Moses and Shmuel were to intercede with Me, I would not be won over to that people (the Israelites)’”); and Psalms 99:6 (“Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel among those who call on His name, when they called to God, He answered them”).

- 25 For relevant comments attributed to earlier Babylonian Amoraim, see b. Sotah 12b–13a (Rav, quoted by either Rav Amram or Rav Na?man) and Sanhedrin 44a (Rav, quoted by Rav Na?man). For later Babylonian comments, see b. Berakhot 7a (anonymous editors) and 32b (anonymous editors); Pesa?im 66b (anonymous editors); ?agigah 4b (anonymous editors); Sotah 34b (Rava); and Baba Batra 8a (Rav Na?man bar Yi?ak). For discussion of the dating of the anonymous sections of the Bavli, see Richard Kalmin, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud: Amoraic or Saboraic?* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1989), pp. 1–11 and the literature cited and discussed on pp. 151–9.
- 26 Interestingly, according to Josephus, whenever the people grumble or revolt against Moses, he convinces them to desist by rational arguments rather than by force of arms or by calling down upon them divine vengeance. See *Antiquities* 3: 296–7 and 306–7; 4:11–12 and 139–44. See also Gohei Hata, “The Story of Moses Interpreted Within the Context of Anti-Semitism,” in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p. 189.
- 27 See b. Shabbat 64a (Rabbah bar Abuha, quoted by Rav Na?man).
- 28 See b. Pesa?im 61b (Resh Lakish).
- 29 Elsewhere, a source without attribution on b. Sanhedrin 82a begins with a quotation of Numbers 25:5, which states that Moses commanded the judges of Israel to slay all those who joined to Baal Peor. The rabbinic statement quickly shifts its focus to the individuals slain by Phinehas: Zimri and Kozbi, and makes no further mention of the Israelites in general. For other relevant sources, see *Sifrei Bemidbar*, Piska 157, ed. Horowitz, p. 211; and b. Shabbat 87a (R. Yosi) and Baba Batra 88b–89a (R. Levi).

The Moses of the Yerushalmi has little bearing on our discussion since we find there only a handful of relevant statements. See, however, y. Rosh Hashanah 59a (R. Yehoshua ben Levi); Taanit 68c (R. Yasa), 68c (R. Yishmael), 68c (R. Yishmael), and 69c (R. Levi); and Sanhedrin 28a (R. Shmuel bar Na?man) and 28d.

- 30 For pagan criticisms of the Jewish people, either biblical or contemporary, see, for example, Stern (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors*, vol. 2, pp. 25–8; 31; 93 (Tacitus); 102–3; 107 (Juvenal); 133 (Florus); 162–3 (Ptolemy); 205 (Apuleius); 220; 264–8; 286; 290–3 (Celsus); 306–7; 314–15 (Galen); 341; 385–7 (Cassius Dio); 448–9 (Porphry); 341; 540; 548 (Julian); 569 (Gregory Nazianzenus); 587 (Libanius); 606 (Ammianus Marcellinus, quoting Marcus Aurelius); 637–8 (Scriptores Historiae Auguste); 663 (Rutilius Namatianus); and vol. 3, p. 55 (Synesius). For Christian criticisms, see, for example, Mary Rose D’Angelo, *Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 4, 8, and 19.

8 AHITOFEL

- 1 This chapter is based on examination of references to Ahitofel in the Yerushalmi (see Moshe Kosowsky (ed.), *O?ar Lashon Talmud Yerushalmi: O?ar ha-Shemot* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, and Jewish Theological

- Seminary, 1985), p. 82; and Bavli (see Binyamin Kosowsky (ed.), *Oʿar ha-Shemot le-Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and Culture, Government of Israel, and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1976–83), pp. 150–1); and the sources collected by Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–38), vol. 4, pp. 94–7; and vol. 6, pp. 256–8; and Yisrael Y.ʔasida, *Oʿar Ishei ha-Tanakh Demutam u-Foalam be-Fi ʔazal* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mas, 1995), pp. 46–8.
- 2 See Aharon Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim* (London: Ha-Express, 1910), p. 120.
 - 3 I have translated the verse according to R.Shmuel bar Naʔmani’s interpretation.
 - 4 The Leiden manuscript reads: “He said something before him and it stopped.”
 - 5 See also the discussion of b. Sanhedrin 106b, below. B.Sanhedrin 104b–105a and y. Sanhedrin 29b express the opinion that Ahitofel has a place in the world to come. This statement contradicts m. Sanhedrin 10:2 which denies to Ahitofel a place in the world to come, but unfortunately I see no way to determine whether the statement is Tannaitic or Amoraic. See also Daniel Boyarin, “Dorshei Reshumot Amru,” *Beer-Sheva* 3 (1988), pp. 23–35.
 - 6 In addition to the sources cited below, see also b. Berakhot 17a–b. It is unclear who was the author of the statement.
 - 7 The text portrays Rav Yehuda and Shmuel discussing a statement by R.Ami, a chronological impossibility. This chronological difficulty has no bearing on our interpretation of their statements.
 - 8 See the discussion of the parallel on b. ʔagigah 15b, above.
 - 9 The printed text reads Rabbah, but see Avraham Liss (ed.), *Dikdukei Soferim ha-Shalem: Sotah* (Jerusalem: Makon ha-Talmud ha-Yisraeli ha-Shalem, 1977–9), notes on line 21, and n. 101, and Richard Kalmin, *Sages, Stories, Authors, and Editors in Rabbinic Babylonia* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 175–92.
 - 10 Negative Babylonian attitudes toward Ahitofel may also be attested on b. Sanhedrin 69b, where the anonymous editors cite the verse “And Ahitofel saw that his advice was not taken, so he saddled his donkey, went home, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself” (2 Samuel 17:23). The editors next quote the verse “Violent and deceitful men will not live out half of their allotted days” (Psalms 55:24), and conclude by citing a Tannaitic statement according to which Ahitofel died at the age of 33. The anonymous Babylonian editors, who placed these sources together, view Ahitofel as one of the “violent and deceitful men” referred to in the biblical verse, and consider his death to be punishment for his wicked behavior. See also the anonymous commentary on b. Sanhedrin 101b. See, however, the discussion of b. Sanhedrin 106b, below.
- Judith Hauptman, *Development of the Talmudic Sugya: Relationship Between Tannaitic and Amoraic Sources* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), claims that sources introduced by the phrase, “It is also taught in a Tannaitic statement,” were molded by later editors to conform to post-Tannaitic sources. If Hauptman is correct, then these two sources provide evidence of negative Babylonian opinion of Ahitofel and tell us nothing about Tannaitic opinion. See the discussion below.
- 11 See also *ibid.*
 - 12 See also the parallel on t. Sotah 4:19. See also y. Sotah 17b.
 - 13 See *DS reish.*
 - 14 Sifrei Bemidbar, ed. Horowitz, p. 51. Regarding the date of Sifrei Bemidbar, see H.L.Strack and G.Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1991: Reprint. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 291–2.
 - 15 See n. 10 above, however.

- 16 M.Avot 6:3 depicts Ahitofel as a sage. However, Y.N.Epstein, *Mavo le-Nusah ha-Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), p. 978, observes that chapter 6 of Avot was copied from Kallah Rabbati. Kallah Rabbati is conventionally dated to the geonic period (see M.B.Lerner, "The External Tractates," in *The Literature of the Sages*, ed. Shmuel Safrai. Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum II/III, Part One (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987), pp. 395–7; and Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, p. 250), although it might contain some earlier material not attested in extant rabbinic sources. See also ?anokh Albeck (ed.), *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah: Nezikin*, pp. 348 and 351.
- 17 Ahitofel is seldom mentioned in Bereshit Rabbah and Vayikra Rabbah. Some of the comments about him in these collections are negative, but with the possible exception of Bereshit Rabbah, ed. Theodor-Albeck, 32:1, pp. 288–9 (paralleled on Bereshit Rabbah 38:1, p. 351), these collections do not depict him as a rabbi. See Bereshit Rabbah, ed. Theodor-Albeck, 20:5, pp. 187–8; and Vayikra Rabbah, ed. Margalit, 5:3, p. 104 (and n. 6, there) and 26:2, p. 590.
- 18 Richard Kalmin, "Christians and Heretics in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, No. 2 (1994), pp. 156–60.
- 19 See William Scott Green, "Palestinian Holy Men: Charismatic Leadership and Rabbinic Tradition," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2:19/2 (1979), pp. 622–47. See y. Taanit 3:11 (67a) and b. Taanit 23a.
- 20 Baruch M.Bokser, "Wonder-Working and the Rabbinic Tradition, The Case of Hanina ben Dosa," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16, No. 1 (1985), pp. 42–92.
- 21 See y. ?agigah 77b and b. ?agigah 14b–15b.

CONCLUSION

- 1 Prior to the fourth Amoraic generation. See Chapters One, Two, and Three, above.
- 2 Jacob Neusner, *Judaism, The Classical Statement: The Evidence of the Bavli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 94–114 and 211–40, claims that independent scriptural commentary, that is, commentary not linked to the Mishnah, is relatively scarce in the Yerushalmi. Very likely, the phenomenon noticed by Neusner is part of the larger issue of the scarcity of scriptural commentary in general in the Yerushalmi. Neusner claims that the Yerushalmi is primarily a Mishnah commentary, whereas the Bavli is more encyclopedic in character. The Bavli is a summa of all rabbinic knowledge, with much Mishnah commentary to be sure, but with vast sections unrelated or only tenuously related to the Mishnah. Because of its more diversified, comprehensive nature, the Bavli won out over the Yerushalmi in the debate over which Talmud was superior, and merited acceptance as *the* Talmud of the Jewish people. Compare the discussion below.
- 3 Yaakov Elman, "Iyyun Midrash and Kellal Midrash in the Last Generations of the Amoraim," in *The Synoptic Problem in Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Shaye J.D.Cohen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, forthcoming), suggests that Mekhilta de-R.Shimon bar Yo?ai is a possible exception and may have been redacted in Babylonia. This one midrashic compilation, however, which incorporates material attributed to Tannaim and is based on parts of the book of Exodus, does not contradict my claim that in general; Babylonian rabbis had to incorporate midrashic material into the Bavli if they wished to transmit it as part of a larger compilation.

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GENERAL INDEX

Note: This index contains references to subjects dealt with in the text, and also in significant references in the notes. Most persons, especially sages and rabbis, are not indexed because the large number of these would have produced an overburdened general index. The index of ancient sources (rabbinic and others), and consultation of the appropriate index entries under Babylonian rabbis, Palestinian rabbis, and particular topics, should provide the reader with appropriate access to these. Modern scholars are mentioned only in cases where their views are discussed in the text; further information can be found in the bibliography.

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